

A FREE & INDEPENDENT magazine for the  
UK underground music scene

# gherwood

Issue 5

PUNK • METAL • HIP HOP • ALTERNATIVE • INDIE • ELECTRONIC • JAZZ



## BORN TO PARTY

DC punks Teen Mortgage talk skate  
videos, Craigslist, and their debut  
album Devil Ultrasonic Dream

### PLUS!

- × Yumi & The Weather
- × Snapped Ankles
- × Soot Sprite

## Editor's note

Welcome - and thanks for picking up this issue of Sherwood.

If you're wondering what this zine is, it's a gift to you. A totally free guide to some of the best new music being made right now with no gimmicks and no catch, just something to read on the train home. We've tried to make music discovery easier for you, so flick straight to your favourite genre and discover something new. We don't interview anyone unless we've seen them live, and know they deserve our support. We're not interested in viral videos, but artists who are still playing intimate venues, such as the 18 brilliant grassroots spaces that stock Sherwood (pages 14-15). You'll also find a column about the grassroots music industry and what we can do to protect it.

Thank you for walking into a great independent venue, picking this zine up, and supporting live music with your time, money and attention.

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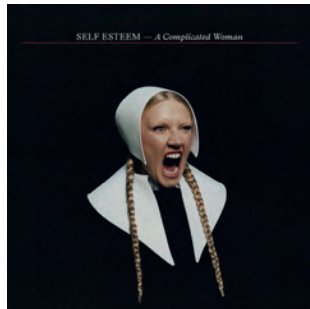
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We started Sherwood because something is missing. People are overwhelmed with new music, small venues are constantly under threat, and real culture is being flattened under algorithmic noise. We're trying to push back, with a real zine in real venues. Inside this issue there are brilliant new records that have been soundtracking our summer, interviews with excellent artists playing killer affordable shows right now, and everything is designed to be useful to you, the reader. We don't cover stadium tours and big names, just acts we've seen live who blew us away.

If you love the basement, the back room, the dive bar, the sweatbox, so do we, and we believe music journalism should be actively helping the scene, not just hovering around the margins or chasing clicks. This is a newsletter from the front lines of a very real war on art and free expression. Whether you're a musician, a promoter, venue staff, or a fan who still pays for live music, thank you, and enjoy. - R. Loxley

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## Thanks for reading Sherwood

Once you're done flicking through, don't just bin this zine. Pass it on to a mate, leave it on a table, or drop it off at your local.

We're only at the beginning of our journey, and we're looking for contributors to take photos, cover gigs and write about what the underground needs more of. If this is you get in touch.

You believe in live music, so do we. You believe in small venues, so do we. You don't like seeing artists ripped off, and neither do we. This our way of doing something about it.  
**Join us on our loud and righteous quest!**



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# BORN TO PARTY

D.C. punks talk to us about the release of their debut album Devil Ultrasonic Dream...



**T**een Mortgage formed in 2017 when guitarist/vocalist James Guile connected with drummer Ed Barakauskas through a stroke of luck via a desperate Craigslist ad after James relocated to Washington D.C. from Liverpool. They quickly built a reputation in the local punk scene, proudly channeling a timeless punk spirit and a hooky pop sensibility, with a sound that's both fun and absolutely furious.

The band's name is a nod to the absurdity of living in the era of late-stage capitalism, as the two musicians juggled day jobs while pouring their

angst and observations into their songwriting. They draw on their city's hardcore heritage by crossbreeding East Coast hardcore with garage and surf-rock, keeping a strong focus on hooks and melody. It's thrashy, riff-driven punk in the style of Dead Kennedys, The Cramps, FIDLAR, and the Tony Hawk's Pro Skater soundtracks, whilst the lyrics tackle topics like the military-industrial complex and the drudgery of dead-end jobs with underdog optimism, feeling both nostalgic and urgently of-the-moment.

A major turning point came in 2024 when Smashing Pumpkins frontman Billy Corgan took notice of the band and personally invited Teen Mortgage to open for Smashing Pumpkins and Weezer on an arena tour. By mid-2024, Ed made the leap of quitting his nursing day-job to pursue the band full-time, and their trajectory has only pointed upwards, scoring slots at major festivals including Download and Louder Than Life. On stage, James and Ed create a huge wall of sound using clever pedal setups, and they never fail to get a mosh pit sweaty and smiling.

We caught up with the band to find out more:

**Tell us the story of the Craigslist ad?**

I (James) am lucky to have dual citizenship in the US and UK, and had moved from Liverpool, UK to the greater Baltimore, Maryland area. I had a couple demos and was desperate to get back into playing live shows with a different line up after the move, so I posted them on Craigslist. Ed (drums) happened to be scrolling through for a source of comedy as there are some strange and desperate people on there. He landed on my post and liked the songs, we had a jam and from there the rest is history.

**What's the significance behind the name Teen Mortgage?**

The name was inspired by Darren Cullen's art piece *Pocket Money Loans* that was featured in Banksy's *Dismaland* show. I thought a 'teen mortgage' was the next step up from a pocket money loan. 'Mortgage' means 'death pledge' in latin, so it refers to the fact that in America, once you turn 18 you take on a series of different loans in order to survive and you do so til death.

**Who are some of your biggest influences, inside and outside of punk rock?**

Skate videos from like 1990 -

2004, that's the golden age of skate videos. What a time to be alive. Skateboarding taught me to have a DIY ethos and that if you practice and progress you will meet your goals. It's all about mind over matter. I love horror movies and the way the villains and creatures of those movies can often be likened to people in real life. Misfits and The Cramps are big influences. We're always comparing making music to the art of making food. Like does it have substance? Has it got enough sauce on it? Is the plating and presentation minimal in its aesthetic?

**Can you take us through some of the messages and specific issues throughout *Devil Ultrasonic Dream*?**

It's all about living your passions in kind of a 'fuck off if you don't like it' kind of way.



**IT'S ALL ABOUT LIVING YOUR PASSIONS IN KIND OF A 'FUCK OFF IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT' KIND OF WAY.**

I write about what I know - working shit jobs during late stage capitalism, partying, and horror movies.

**Has joining the legendary Roadrunner Records changed anything about how you recorded the album compared to previous releases?**

It didn't change a lot. We recorded with our longtime collaborator Kenny Eaton. The only difference is this time a label was paying for it instead of us. It meant there was less pressure about spending time in the studio. Because we had recorded together previously we were able to build on that working relationship and make the best record we feel we've made so far.

**What's the story behind the album title?**

*Devil Ultrasonic Dream* is saying explore your human proclivities and passions as much as possible in spite of Christian fascists, religious zealots, or anyone who is trying to stop you because it doesn't fit their agenda. I was inspired by the 'satanic panic' from the 1980s and the music is largely inspired by that era of punk, metal, hardcore, etc. It's crazy that America has another satanic panic in 2025 and I wanted to make something that portrayed the devil in an unserious way - he's just a rude little dude like Bart Simpson or Sonic the Hedgehog.

**Do you prefer playing in huge arenas, festival fields or tiny clubs?**

Each one is fun in their own way, but I would have to say tiny clubs. They're the most intimate and energetic of the three. It's always the best when the audience is able to stage dive and crowd surf.

**Any cool stories or lessons learned from the Smashing Pumpkins tour?**

Weezer was also on the tour with us and we all had dinner together in Glasgow. After, Rivers took us to see Doja Cat at Ovo Hydro (which is where we played the following night). That was a beyond surreal experience.

The lesson we learned was make sure your song has a big chorus with words people can relate to, as obvious as that sounds. Hearing the arena crowds sing their songs every night was one of those moments where you think "oh yeah, this is the whole point of doing this, this is what we're all working towards".

**Are there any festivals you dream of playing which you haven't yet?**

I think every artist dreams of the big ones like Glastonbury and Coachella, we're no exception. We'd love to do Psycho Fest or Primavera. We're stoked to play CBGB fest this year, Iggy Pop and Jack White are headlining - bit of a dream situation.

**What's the ultimate goal of Teen Mortgage?**

I want to inspire kids to start playing guitar and form their own bands, and hopefully inform them about the world.



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# YUMI & THE WEATHER

It's something in the sea air, says Brighton's Ruby Taylor



Brighton is currently a fertile hotbed of activity for boundary-pushing artists, and the spirit of the city is perfectly embodied by singer-songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, and producer Ruby Taylor, the driving force behind Yumi And The Weather. A mainstay of the scene since her 2013 All We Can EP, Ruby has consistently blended psych-pop, garage rock, electronica, and raw emotional honesty, releasing a string of acclaimed EPs and LPs under her own DIY imprint, MIOHMI Records.

From shimmering indie ballads with spacious harmonies to glitter-soaked dance-pop disco to brooding grunge, few artists move between styles this fluidly and still sound completely like themselves. Ruby's performances with her band are taut and polished, with immaculate interlocking harmonies sounding like they were recorded for the radio, with festival sets at Green Man, Shambala and Nozstock solidifying her reputation as a force whose live energy easily rivals her recorded clarity.

Her commitment to independence runs deep, having launched MIOHMI Records in 2013 to self-release her music and retain complete creative and financial control, not only releasing her own ambitious work but curating and championing other artists in the Brighton scene, with every release handled end-to-end from production and artwork to pressing and promotion. Her songs have received airtime and praise from BBC 6Music DJs including Lauren

Laverne & Guy Garvey.

We caught up with Ruby to find out more:

**Hi Ruby! Your songs span such a wide spectrum, from surfy spaghetti-western to lush indie-pop to grungy psych. Do you choose the mood first, or do the songs dictate the style each time?**

Hiya! Unfortunately, the music dictates each time. It is relentlessly eclectic, and I don't know what is going to come out. It's like dreams, you know you are going to go to sleep but what you dream isn't really in your control. Once it starts to come out I then take the reigns of the song and write lyrics accordingly.

**Your songs are really rich with sonic detail. When do you know a song is "done"? Are you a perfectionist, or do you just like to get stuff done?**

**IT IS RELENTLESSLY ECLECTIC, AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT IS GOING TO COME OUT. IT'S LIKE DREAMS, YOU KNOW YOU ARE GOING TO GO TO SLEEP BUT WHAT YOU DREAM ISN'T REALLY IN YOUR CONTROL.**

Oh I am glad you think so! It is generally down to the mixing when I feel it is done, and I sometimes hear the harmonic melodies that I build on before and make them hearable, or I just keep it simple and make sure the vocal and instrument delivery is how I imagine it. It's constantly challenging and I am always pushing myself to get the take I can hear in my head.

**Has your approach to songwriting and production changed significantly since your first EPs?**

Oh yes, majorly. I think also having done live sound I'm always experimenting, so it's nice to be able to choose how to produce for certain songs. Usually I hear it in my head so I'm just trying to imitate what is already there but that has only come due to experience and play.

**Your live sets sound like a studio mix. How exactly do you and your band achieve such an astonishingly tight level of polish?**

I am glad you think so, thank you, I guess cause we love playing and listen to each other. Even though we don't rehearse as much as I'd like I guess it means we are kept on our toes and lock in together to support each other sonically.

**We seem to be discovering a new great band out of Brighton every few weeks. How would you describe the current energy in the city?**

OMG it's absolutely buzzing and thriving so much, I am blown away by Brighton's music community. I feel so inspired by it. For such a small 'City', it's giving the goods alright. It's defo not something in the water, I reckon it's in the sea air.

**Are there any venues, record shops, or spaces in Brighton that you'd like to highlight? How do you think the city has shaped your overall approach?**

Oh jeez there are too many to choose from but I will list the ones that spring to mind right now:

The Rose Hill, Pink Moon (Record Shop/Cafe/Venue), Prince Albert, Green Door Store, ALPHABET, The Hope and Ruin, Folklore Rooms, Dust, Cowley Club, Rossi Bar, The Pipeline....Argh there are so many good ones!! We are spoiled here for sure re: music venues!!

Rarekind Records and Resident are still going and are great, unfortunately we just lost a great indie one recently - Family Store Records & Gallery on North Road, who were SO supportive of the local underground artists & bands.

**PLEASE SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL RECORD SHOPS AND GRASSROOTS VENUES!!!!**

Last but not least BIG shout out to Bill at The Farm: Artist Project Space for managing an awesome space

**What's your most memorable Brighton gig?**

The HelpMeHelpMe fundraiser at ALPHABET was the most memorable one to date because of its importance, but a past show that was memorable was playing Pink Moon recently during TGE (my label MIOHMI Records take over upstairs during The Great Escape). I just had the best time as I loved seeing friends and new faces in the crowd who came to support, playing new songs after a year out from playing as Yumi, it couldn't have gone any better really!

**What kind of artist grabs your attention as a label curator and makes you want to get behind someone else's work?**

I guess their music just needs to hit that place - you know the one! And feel that emotional connection that can give power or release, or both. When I feel it is good, the music makes me cry, not in sadness, but in appreciation. I feel so grateful to hear it.

passion. You can get worn out and feel tired with everything that needs to be done, or could be done, and it's about prioritising with the time and energy you have. I have learnt that you can do whatever you want to do if you put the time in, even if it is a minute, it's something and that's at least not nothing. I do also have a team I work with so it's not just me - shout out Martin & Josh at MIOHMI!

**WE ALL WORK TO OUR STRENGTHS AND HAVE EACH OTHER'S BACKS, AS WE'VE BEEN THROUGH A LOT TOGETHER, AND WE'RE NOT AFRAID TO HAVE HONEST CONVERSATIONS IF THEY NEED HAVING AND THEN MOVE FORWARD WITH POSITIVITY!**

**IT'S ABSOLUTELY BUZZING AND THRIVING SO MUCH, I AM BLOWN AWAY BY BRIGHTON'S MUSIC COMMUNITY.**

for artists and musicians to hire for their various creative outlets. The space has been used by myself, and bands on MIOHMI, and spaces like this are so crucial and precious.

**What's the biggest lesson you've learned from running your own label in today's landscape?**

I realise that passion creates drive, and drive sustains





***Across the UK, over 800 grassroots venues serve as launchpads for the musicians of tomorrow. Born in backrooms, basements, old pubs, and repurposed spaces, they foster community and creativity far beyond what their square footage might suggest.***

***The Ground Up is a new Substack dedicated to telling their stories. Through in-depth interviews and behind-the-scenes reporting, we explore how these venues came to be, the challenges they face, and why they matter.***

***We've already spoken to venues from London to Yorkshire – and we're just getting started. This is an ongoing project, and we're always looking for stories to tell.***

***If you run, work at, or love a grassroots venue and have a story to share, get in touch via our Substack. We'd love to hear from you.***

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# Snapped Ankles

## Disco for Doomsday...

Formed in East London in 2011, Snapped Ankles honed their craft at DIY nights and warehouse parties, where they would improvise amid chopped-up 1960s film projections and primitive synth experiments. Performing anonymously in shaggy ghillie suits backed with an explosive blend of jagged post-punk and electronic noise, they grapple with themes of rampant property development and urban gentrification, dressing like woodland spirits and skewering real-world issues with wit and ire.

All of these elements coalesce powerfully on the band's newest studio album, *Hard Times Furious Dancing*. The title is a mission statement, and the album channels the turmoil of our present political chaos and economic hardship into a pagan dance party for the end of the world. We caught up with the band to find out more:

### Can you tell us about those early days playing in warehouses and how that shaped the band's identity?

The first spores of Snapped Ankles took root in the cold, damp corners of the last derelict warehouse spaces in East London, before they all mutated into luxury hotels and gleaming voids for offshore wealth. Back then, we had these vast, echoing cathedrals of brick and asbestos where we could rig up lights, projections,

and summon a bit of controlled chaos. Snapped Ankles first emerged improvising live soundtracks to strange short films, but soon we needed something more... primal. The constraints of the warehouse space—the challenge of installing quick, high-intensity performances—forced us to rethink what a band could be.

### Outside of tired labels like 'post-punk' and 'krautrock', what are some key influences on your performance style?

We're children of carnivals and occult cabarets. Rock 'n' roll theatrics that've been soaked in lighter fluid and set ablaze by Jerry Lee Lewis. Iggy Pop hurling himself across broken glass in a divine seizure. Keiji Haino channeling spirits through his delay pedals. James Brown collapsing down to the splits in the ecstatic fury of the funk one and up again on Clyde Stubblefield 3rd ghost note.

There's also the Chitrali dancers of northern Pakistan—I once witnessed them spiral in circular dances for hours in the Hunza Valley, blurring the line between trance and transcendence. These are all rituals.





Sacred, feral and durational like a long night in the land of rave. We want to tap into the same frequencies—the frequencies Anton LaVey might've piped through the walls of the Black House while performing a sex magick rite with a theremin.

**Can you talk about the phrase 'Hard Times Furious Dancing' and where it came from?**

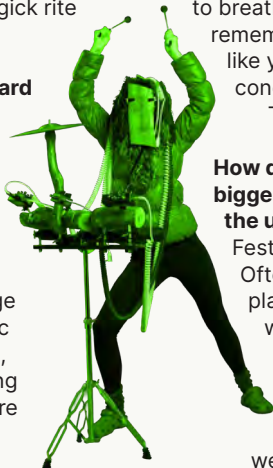
It's a phrase from Alice Walker's book *Hard Times Require Furious Dancing*—she writes about a wake where grief turns to dancing, and the people form a line of catharsis. That image stuck with us. In these apocalyptic end-stage-capitalism days—wars, ecological ruin, billionaires joyriding into the stratosphere—it feels more vital than ever.

Dance becomes protest. A furious resistance. A writhing, ecstatic denial of the void. And for us, creating more dancefloor-oriented music was a natural evolution—if the ship's sinking, we might as well throw the most unholy rave the world's ever seen. Think of it as disco for doomsday.

**The new album leans more into dance and electronic elements than your previous records. What inspired this move?**

Honestly? Practicality. Survival. The groove has always been central to Snapped Ankles—rituals need rhythm—but we wanted to make it feel like a rave held by forest-dwelling cultists who've only read about raves in crumbling magazines left behind by the Crass obsessed punks.

We took over MOT club in London—a rave bunker notorious for long weekends of DONK and delirium. With the band thrown into the middle of the space, deconstructing our songlike demos and rebuilding them in a fog of strobes, lasers, and barely contained entropy. It was part Dionysian cult, part Jack Parsons rocket test. The idea was: what if pagan wood spirits got hold of sequencers and a surround sound PA system?



**What do you hope to achieve at a Snapped Ankles show?**

That moment at MOT. When the room becomes a blur. When the air gets too thick to breathe. When you forget your name but remember how to move. When it feels like you're not at a gig, but at a séance conducted by malfunctioning synths. That's the goal.

**How does it feel to bring the show to bigger festival crowds after coming up in the underground circuit?**

Festival crowds are a different beast. Often, they've just been snacking on plastic pints and stodgy churros and worried about the toilet queue. So we have to go in all logs blazing—we don't ease in, we invade!

We just closed Glastonbury playing the last set of the entire weekend at 4AM in Shangri-La. At first, it was dead quiet between tracks—I thought we were tanking—but through the strobes, I could see a huge hoard, heads down, dancing. They weren't talking. They were just dancing. Trance-mode activated. That's when you know the spell's working.

**Do you see crowds reacting to the political commentary, or are they mostly there for a mad dance?**

Both. And that's the beauty of it. If people want to scream into the void about Palestine, Ukraine, the cost-of-living death spiral—good. If they want to do it with their hips and sweat and a gurn—even better.

Protest has always been rhythmical—drums in the forests, chants in the squares, techno on the barricades. If the system is collapsing, we might as well write our manifestos together on the dancefloor. We laugh into the void. And then we groove.



**Snapped Ankles are heading out on tour again all around the UK and Europe from October, culminating in 2 headline shows in London on December 13th at the Inisstitute of Contemporary Arts.**

# Where to find **Sherwood**

These are the treasured venues and record stores across London where you can currently find Sherwood:

## **Dalston**

### **Next Door Records Two**

A record shop, café, bottle shop and live music venue all rolled into one vibrant corner space in Stoke Newington. By day it's a relaxed hub of vinyl browsing and coffee, by night its basement space hosts some of the best emerging underground acts.

### **The Shacklewell Arms**

A rowdy pub and punk venue, The Shacklewell Arms is at the heart of Dalston's music scene, with a back-room gig space that's always packed, loud, and raucous, and an excellent courtyard outside for refuge when it gets too sweaty.

### **The Victoria**

A sunlit pub with top-tier open-air seating, The Victoria always feels like home. Bohemian comfort sets the tone for a back-room venue hidden behind a bookcase where up-and-coming bands take the stage to a warmly welcoming crowd.



## **South London & East End**

### **The George Tavern**

A classic, Grade II-listed Stepney public house, The George shines with history, with a warm, timeless interior in one of London's most threatened music venue districts. Despite repeated pushes from developers and noise complaints, The George still stands!

### **Hootananny Brixton**

A riotous venue where the music listings read like a mini-festival with reggae, hip-hop, Latin, ska, jungle and more. With a sprawling beer garden and street-food stalls, Hootananny is one joyous, super chill party.

### **New Cross Inn**

A 350-capacity pub and gig venue that hosts live music seven nights a week, from up-and-coming punk and metal bands to internationally touring acts. Loved by the DIY community and legends of the scene.

### **Fox & Firkin**

Recently refurbished, this Lewisham gem has a gorgeous, expansive beer garden, on-site brewery and world-class reggae, jazz, rave music and more. Welcoming and warm, every night feels like a summer celebration.



## Camden

### The Fiddler's Elbow

This independent, Grade II-listed pub combines comfy sofas with supremely intimate gigs. Open most nights with bands spanning indie, punk, soul, jazz, metal and more.

### The Lock Tavern

Opposite Camden Market, The Lock Tavern has hosted early shows by Adele, Franz Ferdinand and more, and remains the perfect place to discover new acts or to soak up the atmosphere with friends.

### The Hawley Arms

Revived from the ashes of a devastating fire in 2008, The Hawley Arms is indelibly linked to Camden's story as a beloved haunt of Amy Winehouse, Noel Fielding and Pete Doherty, and remains a nucleus of Camden's live music landscape.

### The Devonshire Arms

Camden's unwavering home to free-entry shows, you can wander into The Dev and catch five great bands without spending a penny. A whirlwind of punk, metal, and hardcore with barely enough room to breathe.

### The Dublin Castle

Shaping music history since Madness's first gig there in January 1979, The Dublin Castle has hosted everyone from Blur to Coldplay to Arctic Monkeys in its iconic back room. Still family-run and hosting great new talent decades in.

### All Ages Records/Raven Records

London's essential destinations for punk and metal fans. All Ages keeps the punks happy, while Raven Records anchors the metal scene with everything from death to glam, plus regular signings and community hangouts.

## Islington

### The Garage

A 600-capacity live music staple since 1993, The Garage is the go-to room for rising bands on the brink.

### The Grace

An intimate 150-capacity upstairs gig room lit by 50 glittering disco balls, The Garage's smaller, sister room is a firm Sherwood favourite for seeing up-and-coming bands in an elbow-to-elbow setting, with regular sell outs and an electric vibe. Tiny in size, towering in spirit.





# WIELD YOUR HOPE

The Exeter-based trio Soot Sprite have emerged as one of the UK's most compelling underground acts, blending shoegaze, emo, and dream pop into something that feels completely of-the-moment. Across their debut album, *Wield Your Hope Like A Weapon*, frontwoman Elise Cook leads with raw lyrical candour, untangling grief, self-doubt, and resistance, veering from soft, tender passages to enormous walls of noise.

Starting as Cook's solo bedroom project, Soot Sprite quickly expanded into a fully-formed live band, and earned critical nods for their lush guitar work and vulnerable songwriting, but *Wield Your Hope Like A Weapon*, released earlier this year on Specialist Subject Records, is a major step up, capturing a life of small emotional earthquakes and quiet acts of strength.

The band have just concluded a tour of the UK in support of the album, hitting intimate venues where community matters, and their fanbase is growing with every gig. We caught up with Elise Cook to find out more:

**Wield Your Hope Like A Weapon is such a powerful title - can you unpack it for us?**

The title was inspired by a novel by Rebecca Solnit called "Hope In The Dark", it explores

themes of hope being the fuel behind activism and real change and how that has persisted.

There was a particular quote that stuck: "Hope is not a lottery ticket you can sit on the sofa and clutch, feeling lucky. It is an axe you break down doors with in an emergency"

Both the message and the imagery struck me, hence the artwork!

**What was the writing process like for the album? Is it a collection of songs that have existed for a while or are they all responses to more current themes?**

It's a bit of both! It took years to write fully but finding a common thread through it all helped with things massively, if you dig into your feelings about how the world looks around you there's patterns to be found. I wanted to write about hope but from an honest place, where hope is not easily found, and feels impossible sometimes, not just preaching this idea without the truth of the matter. So I left it all in, the moments of despair in 'Doomed' and moments of strength in the title track.

**Are there any particular artists or albums that you'd point to as an influence?**

When it came to writing it's tricky to pinpoint influences, but coming up to recording there





# LIKE A WEAPON

were definitely some records we were honing in on, *Rat Saw God* by Wednesday, *Buds* by Ovlov, and Drug Church had been releasing tracks from *Prude*. A big record that always stuck with me is *The Big Roar* by The Joy Formidable, it's one of my all time favourites, Ritzzy Bryan is a bit of a hero for me.

## **How did you find the crowd reactions on tour?**

Tour was really beautiful, seeing how the album had connected with people and there were nights I could hear people singing every word back and that is WILD to me.

## **How do you hope people feel listening to the album or seeing you live?**

I think I just hope people feel understood, and we've received so many messages that say just that. I wanted to capture how it feels to live now, in a world where we have a genocide live-streamed into our pockets only to be told "That's not what you're seeing". To have our rights stripped away piece by piece and be told it was a privilege we ever had them. It's righteous anger and despair, but all is not lost, and you're certainly not alone. That's what I want people to feel ultimately.

## **We noticed you make an appearance on the excellent new Regal Cheer album 'Quite Good'. How did that come about, and are there any other bands or artists you'd like to shout out?**

We've been pals with those boys since I played a solo set with them when I was touring with Shit Present, so when they asked me to appear on a track it was a no brainer. They recorded their album the week before we did with Tom Hill at The Bookhouse so I literally just spent 15 minutes doing a couple takes when we were in, it was easy peasy and lovely! We're really fortunate to have bonded with so many other DIY bands, Don't Worry, SUDS, I Told You I Would Eat You, Fortitude Valley. I could

definitely just go on forever.

## **What are your favourite venues in the country?**

Myself and Sean cut our teeth at The Cavern in Exeter, but some other favourites would have to be The Hope & Ruin in Brighton, The Grove in Nottingham and The Exchange in Bristol.

## **Do you feel optimistic about DIY culture in the UK right now?**

Yes and no. Yes in a sense that our scene is amazing and full of talented and kind bands all lifting each other up and cheering each other on. No in a sense of the general economy really. Selling tickets for shows is a nightmare in terms of presales because people are living month to month, and gig fees are the same as they were in the 90's so if you need to rent a vehicle and cover petrol then a £100 fee doesn't touch the sides. Or as we experienced on this run, one promoter actually paid us nothing, so that's a massive loss! If we hadn't done so well on merch this tour we wouldn't be able to afford to go back out again in August for our next tour because we too

are often living paycheck to paycheck. Arts are one of the UK's biggest exports, yet they are so underfunded and constantly being cut at a grassroots level that it makes you question the longevity of it. None of us expect to make money off this, but for the amount of work that goes in, I do wonder if it can continue to come at quite the cost it does. So if you're wondering why your favourite artists or venues are disappearing, it's no secret as to why.

## **What is the ultimate goal of Soot Sprite?**

I think ultimately to just keep putting our big feelings into big songs, keep playing shows and being a part of the scene that we love so much. It's hard to imagine ever not doing Soot Sprite as my life has revolved so solidly around it for seven years now & I owe many of my most precious friendships to it.

YOU'RE CERTAINLY  
NOT ALONE, AND  
THAT'S WHAT I WANT  
PEOPLE TO FEEL  
ULTIMATELY

## Punk & Metal

### If you like Rancid, you'll love *This Ain't Gonna End Well...* by Mean Bikini.

Mean Bikini have made one of the most fun punk records we've heard in ages. It's half an hour of fast, loud, groovy, screamy skate punk with no ambient detours or unexpected moments of reflection, just revving guitars, pounding drums, shouted gang vocals, and absolutely *ridiculous* basslines. It's the spiritual grandkid of Let's Go-era Rancid, with basslines clearly taking a leaf straight from the Matt Freeman playbook. The vocals are fantastic, with pitched fry screams delivered with infectious fury, and celebratory venom. There are no filler tracks, but *The Bars Too Low* is a total riot highlight with a tongue-twistingly fast hook.

With full-throttle speed, ragged urgency, groovy swing, and phenomenal bass playing, the drums lock in like a freight train barreling downhill with the velocity of Bad Religion or NoFX and the massive physical force of The Bronx. Lyrically, *This Ain't Gonna End Well...* hits all the classic targets that punk's always had in its sights, but it's not abstract or vague: it's clearly responding to the present moment, with all the fury and clarity of a band who've had enough of watching history repeat itself. This is protest music sharpened to a point, and launched like a missile. This is a four-piece that love the same bands, feel the same fury, and know exactly what this music is for.



### If you like Ramones, you'll love *Devil Ultrasonic Dream* by Teen Mortgage.

This is peak Tony Hawk's Pro Skater worship - wall-to-wall adrenaline with the rough-hewn glory of old-school skate punk. Though Teen Mortgage are just a duo, this record is thick with overdubs: snarling bass, extra rhythm guitars, lead lines, and layered gang vocals, but not in a way that polishes the rage away. It's fuzzed, fried, and gloriously trashy, with the 'in-the-can' energy that defined early DIY hardcore - a perfect vehicle for the album's clenched-first message.



Beneath the fuzz and fury is pure rock and roll craftsmanship and seriously well-written songs, scrappy and screamed. Teen Mortgage have proven you can have hooks and melody without sanding down the dirt in the raw, urgent lineage of Misfits and Descendents.

### If you like Trivium, you'll love *Imperium Delirium* by Shadow of Intent.

*Imperium Delirium* is a staggering testament to how far modern deathcore can go. Both monstrously heavy and thrillingly cinematic, Bryce Butler's lightning-fast footwork rivals the virtuosity of Meshuggah and Gojira whilst Ben Duerr's vocals are flawlessly ferocious. Huge emotional territory delivered with unapologetic intensity, this record rips you up, breaks you down, and launches you back into chaos with incredible songcraft and memorable hooks. This is purpose-driven, artful brutality. The grand orchestration and breathless song structure add up to something far beyond ordinary deathcore, delightfully overblown, but grounded in professionalism.





**If you like Fugazi, you'll love Quite Good by Regal Cheer.**

Putting two and a half stars on your own album cover, calling it Quite Good and then proceeding to blow the bloody doors off is a bold move. This is raw, scrappy, unpredictable punk where every guitar riff fills the corners whilst the two bandmates yell together, full throttle like early Against Me! or Hot Water Music, tearing out their guts with glee. Only two of the twelve songs stretch past the two-minute mark, but they're bursting with structural invention,



with drums that punctuate and elevate rather than just keeping time, cutting in ahead of the beat and locking into glorious half-time breakdowns to make the lyrics hit even harder.

The album feels ambitious despite

its miniature runtime, and the themes are personal but deeply relatable British misery, all shit jobs and betrayals. This isn't punk in the mohawks-and-studded-belts sense, avoiding every tired cliché of the genre without ever sounding like they're trying to be clever about it. There's no joy in the lyrics, but there's a tangible love for the riffs and the beautiful racket of punk rock done right that celebrates the form, giving the record a sly optimism, and a grin behind the scream.

**If you like Green Day, you'll love THE EP by The Pill.**

The Pill's debut EP is gloriously silly. A 13-minute sugar rush of British satire, giddy chaos, and blistering hooks. Across six tracks, they blitz through grooves and subjects in a fast, funny, and completely unserious way.



If Lambrini Girls channel queer rage, The Pill are leaning into the ditzzy, air headed blonde caricature and revelling in it, leading with humour above anger. Opener POSH sets the tone at a careening pace, tearing through a send-up of rah-rah, Gap-Yah, cocaine-sniffing trust fund girls, while Scaffolding Man is about making sure the attractive man working outside your window sees you naked after taking a shower. Problem builds a brilliant call-and-response structure begging for a live crowd, and it's really, really fun. While the playing isn't flashy or complex, it's tight and it slams just as hard as any anarcho punk band. They're using the same raw, aggressive punk toolkit as their peers, but instead of coming at you with righteous fury, they're coming at you with cheeky punchlines, sounding like they've each been handed one of those massive tubes of Smarties and downed it all at once.

**If you like Napalm Death, you'll love TNT by Wormrot.**

This is grindcore in its element, capturing Wormrot's original lineup live in TNT studios for just under 20 minutes with no edits and no overdubs, and it's everything you want from a grindcore trio. This isn't just blast-beat endurance. Instead, the music lurches violently from d-beat punk to groove metal to absolute noise freakouts and back again. Opener Sledgehammer is like a Formula One car pulling away, each repeat accelerating tighter and faster, and Wormrot do the stop-start better than anyone, cutting to silence and letting a single vocal bark hang in the air for a quarter of a second before slamming back in. It's masterful. The album feels like a defiant victory lap. Grindcore, metalcore, hardcore, this album makes a strong case for how little genre classifications matter, because grindcore may not be in fashion, but this sounds as current and dangerous as anything from the modern hardcore wave.



## Alternative & Indie

**If you like Red Hot Chili Peppers, you'll love Carpe Diem, Moonman by Psychedelic Porn Crumpets.**

Carpe Diem, Moonman is one of the most relentlessly fun records of the year. A hyperkinetic funk-metal thrill ride, combining lightning-fast arpeggios with airtight grooves and a sense of joyful mayhem that's cartoonish in the best way. Opening with an irresistible one-two punch, Another Reincarnation and March On for Pax Ramona blow the doors off with riffs that dazzle in under a second. The musicianship here is insane, channeling the harmonic logic of classical composition - Bach or Mozart filtered through fuzz pedals - using shifting arpeggios and polyrhythmic patterns that hit your brain before you have time to consciously follow them. It's dazzlingly impressive, but it's also absurdly fun. This isn't virtuosity for its own sake, but crowd-moving, head-nodding, chaos-inciting joy, built for bouncing. It's joyful, immediate, and silly in the best way - a masterclass in musicianship that doesn't take itself too seriously. The songs rarely spill over four minutes, and never lose their groove. Carpe Diem, Moonman is a record as tightly wound and riff-stacked as a prog-metal showcase, but as bouncy, silly, and groove-led as the '90s funk revival. The musicianship recalls guitar greats like Megadeth but it's jammy, joyous, and wonderfully unpretentious. A technicolour rollercoaster of summer riffs and total absurdity.



**If you like Eagles of Death Metal, you'll love Viagr Aboys by Viagra Boys.**

It's funny and strangely endearing hearing a rock star undermining the myth of the rock star while still throwing the party, and that tension is key to what makes this band work: they play the role to excess while making it obvious they know it's ridiculous. And while there's humour

and theatricality, it's not parody in the way The Darkness or Steel Panther might be. They're lampooning the concept of the rock star itself and the absurdity of the swagger, all while embracing it with both arms.



Frontman Sebastian Murphy absolutely channels the same instinct as Mick Jagger, both inhabiting and mocking the role he's playing. The stage is a place of heightened reality, and sometimes you have to become a caricature to say something true.

**If you like Blur, you'll love Cool To Drive by Gallus.**

Five fiery tracks of Buckfast-fueled mayhem from Glasgow, this EP makes one hell of a statement. It's hooky, punk-laced, and bloody fun party music, like Parklife or Common People

but reimagined with a serious slice of Glasgow grit, hedonism and carnivalesque bravado. Every riff is sculpted to explode, with hilarious, frustrated lyrics howling at modern life, addiction, absurdity, and ennui, chronicling drug binges, regret, and self-destruction with classic Scots-born heaviness. You can feel that these guys love making a racket together. This is what happens when you filter Britpop anthemics through whiskey, ketamine, and bad decisions, sounding like they've just survived a four-day bender and they're ready for a fight at last orders.





**If you like The Kinks, you'll love Felt Better Alive by Peter Doherty.**

There's something quietly miraculous about Felt Better Alive, the new album by Peter Doherty - not because it's a comeback, but because it sounds like he's finally come home. For years, the press has framed Doherty as a fallen romantic hero: brilliant, erratic, and doomed. But underneath the tabloid tragedy was always a different truth - that he was never meant to be a rock star in the first place. He was always a folk singer, a songwriter steeped in the English

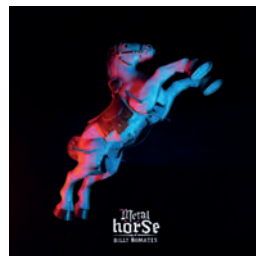


tradition, closer to Ray Davies or Paul McCartney than to the swaggering indie frontmen he was lumped in with. On Felt Better Alive, that truth finally has the room to breathe. Doherty's songwriting, long buried beneath

chaos and distortion, is in sharp focus. His gift for unusual chord changes, vivid phrasing, and melancholic wit now feels clear and centred. There's melancholy of course, the years haven't been easy, but there's also good humour and charm. It's warm, not dour. You get the sense he's enjoying music and life again, and even when he leans into sadness, it's held with a softness that feels tender rather than tormented.

**If you like Kate Bush, you'll love Metalhorse by Billy Nomates.**

There's a richness to Metalhorse that feels like it's been lifted from another time. It's not just the maturity of the songwriting, but the absolute command Tor Maries has over her voice, with a deeply rooted clarity to her performances. Huge choruses shimmer with brightness and the drums tumble and roll with a lightness



that carries you, as the crystal-clear production works to serve a vocal performance that's endlessly expressive, full of subtle dynamic shifts and perfectly placed harmonies, the work of someone in total control of their powers. These are polished songs that don't apologise for their heart or their optimism. Across the record, Billy Nomates captures a spectrum of emotional states from the dizzy rush of the new to the quiet ache of loss, each song a vivid mood piece rendered in lovely intuitive songwriting from an artist with total command of tone and texture. There's so much colour and attention to detail, whilst staying intimate like a friend reaching out their hand and saying, dance with me.

**If you like The Beatles, you'll love Phantom Island by King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard.**

The twenty-seventh (yes, twenty-seventh) King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard album is a vivid technicolour swim through the lushest corners of the late '60s and early '70s, finding the band digging deep into the dayglo extravagance of psychedelic pop with funk grooves and full brass sections. The single Deadstick is a standout example, with the tightly grooving funk-pop energy of Elton John during his most feather-boa, piano-stomping moments. Phantom Island is languid, summery, and proudly lush with clever attention to detail in conjuring vintage tones that replicate The Beatles' late-stage palette. If any other band told you they were going to make a Sgt. Pepper's psychedelic disco-funk yacht rock glam album, you'd clear your schedule for the incoming car crash, but King Gizzard set the bar at "absurd" and jump clean over it like it's just another Tuesday.



## Alternative & Indie

### If you like David Bowie, you'll love The Painful Truth by Skunk Anansie.

Skunk Anansie's first album in nearly a decade is powerful, passionate, and full of assurance, clarity and purpose, 38 minutes of pop-inflected rock delivered by one of the UK's most unmistakable voices, reasserting Skin's place as not just a frontwoman, but a cultural figurehead. The Painful Truth is full of tracks destined for festival main stages, with tremendous energy pulsing through the whole record. It's easy to imagine these songs standing tall alongside the classics in their back catalogue, pulling from an impressive sprawl of genres. There's dub, ska, heavy rock, industrial, and more, with Animal crashing in like something from Nine Inch Nails. Whether she's whispering something vulnerable or bellowing defiance into the rafters, Skunk Anansie build a world that lets Skin holler, howl, and command the room. It's great to have them back.



### If you like PJ Harvey, you'll love In Ways by Slung.

In Ways is a debut album that already feels classic, arriving fully-formed, purposeful, and rich with identity. Katie Oldham's vocals are breathtaking, switching between sensual melodies, screams, and titanic choruses that would make Bonnie Tyler proud. The riffs are huge, sludgy and grungey, and the emotional scope of the album is massive. In Ways manages to feel expansive while keeping the songs lean and punchy, rarely crossing the



four-minute mark because of the band's intuitive use of space. There's a heavy alt-country influence running through this record - a genre built for heartbreak - and here it becomes a raw, expressive vehicle for personal

reckonings and grungy swagger, feeling gutsy, vulnerable and vital with top-class performances across the board. It's extremely rare to hear a new rock band this tight, this emotional, and this electrifying on their debut.

### If you like Sonic Youth, you'll love neumann by baan.

Hailing from Busan, South Korea, baan's new album Neumann is entirely devoted to the power of fuzz. Across an hour-long sprawl, they construct a monolith of noise that nods to shoegaze, sludge, post-hardcore, early 2000s emo, groove metal and grunge, capturing a very specific feeling and riding it for dear life. The vocals are buried deep in the mix. Sometimes you get a shouted rant, sometimes gang vocals, but never a clear line, recalling My Bloody Valentine or even Cocteau Twins but with far more angst - a kind of screamo-influenced shoegaze with zero polish, all heart. This is emo played in the format of a stoner jam band, and each track touches on so many strands of heavy guitar music that have meant the world to teenagers and outsiders for decades.



**If you like Cocteau Twins, you'll love dust suspended on a sunbeam by Julia Why?.**

Julia Why? is an Australian trio who absolutely nail the tone and texture of classic shoegaze and dream-pop, but without burying their songs under so much haze that you lose the plot. The vocals are soft and misty like Cocteau Twins, but they're also legible and melodic, floating above the instruments rather than dissolving into them. Pale Blue Dot leans into Kevin Shields' languid guitar bends, whilst Deep Fake is the album's most magical earworm, the



chorus layering bass, guitar and a double-tracked vocal into a single shifting, lilting, hazy harmony as sharp as anything in the genre's canon. Not content to just vibe, Julia Why? writes songs with emotional clarity,

great riffs, and sticky choruses that haunt long after. A serious entry in the shoegaze canon that's absolutely worth your time.

**If you like Sufjan Stevens, you'll love 2 by Foxwarren.**

There's something not just nostalgic, but incredibly tactile and handmade about

Foxwarren's latest album, taking the sweet intimacy of indie folk and running it through the mechanics of sampling and collage. The production is quietly dazzling with pianos chopped into soft loops, dusty drums that



shuffle with hip-hop groove, and strings that swirl like something from The Avalanches. 2 leans into something incredibly friendly, like the musical equivalent of a hand-sewn quilt or an Etsy trinket, with everything designed to make you feel warm, held, and delighted. It feels like throwing on a vintage movie reel as a deliberate act of resistance to modernity's speed, inviting you to slow down and take in something quietly beautiful and delicately sweet.

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## Electronic, Pop & Experimental

### If you like Floating Points, you'll love Under Tangled Silence by DjRUM.

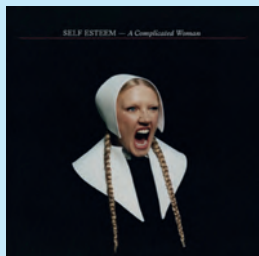
Delicate, aching modern classical compositions that wouldn't be out of place on a Nils Frahm record sit side by side with warped percussive experiments. Congas patter, kicks pulse, the drum programming is mind-bendingly intricate, but it never feels cold. Under Tangled Silence is alive with mourning, movement, and mystery, reaching for connection as it splinters rhythm and time apart. On the final track Sycamore, an overwhelming crescendo of rapid-fire kicks rise from a sub-bass murmur into a blinding strobe-light thump, and it's one of the heaviest moments you'll hear on any album this year - electronic, metal, or otherwise. The grooves defy obvious time signatures - it's often impossible to count along - and yet they're unmistakably danceable. The breakbeats don't sit neatly in the lineage of jungle or garage, instead being used like brushstrokes, layered and fractured to the point of abstraction, but never losing their physical, bodily pull. DjRUM has carved something rare: a record of profound emotional intelligence that still kicks like a mule.



Djrum Under Tangled Silence

### If you like P!nk, you'll love A Complicated Woman by Self Esteem.

A Complicated Woman is one of the most cathartic, empowering, and uproariously funny pop records of the year, rooted firmly in the reality of modern womanhood. It's a record for grown-ups - especially those who are fed

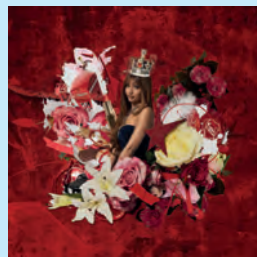


up, emotionally bruised, and still powering forward. Rebecca Lucy Taylor draws on every conceivable strand of pop, from gospel to house club anthems, all filtered through her singular voice and presence. Serving

as the backbone is an enormous choir soaring above the pounding beats, a celebration of the collective female voice. The record manages to be gut-wrenchingly emotional and spiritually resonant, while also being proudly full of dirty language and dirty thoughts.

### If you like Basement Jaxx, you'll love Fancy That by PinkPantheress.

PinkPantheress' Fancy That is a sleek, stylish sugar rush of a record with nine tracks in 20 minutes, and not a second wasted. PinkPantheress uses hooks and loops not as seasoning but as instruments in themselves, resulting in a kind of pop sampledelica. Despite sourcing some of the druggiest records in club history, it feels remarkably clean and sober - not in a sterile way, but a joyful one. This isn't a soundtrack to being off your nut in a warehouse, but a love letter to hearing songs on the school run, or out of your older sibling's bedroom. Less "night on pills", more "girly sleepover", PinkPantheress is crafting some of the most exciting pop music around, straddling the line between pop and rave.

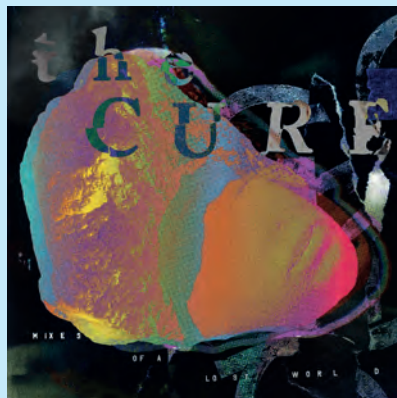




**If you like The Chemical Brothers, you'll love  
Mixes Of A Lost World by The Cure.**

Mixes Of A Lost World is, quite simply, the most ambitious, accomplished, and emotionally resonant remix album we've ever encountered. While most remix collections tend to function as appendices or bonus discs for completists, Mixes Of A Lost World has the gravity and solemnity of something far more substantial, playing not like an afterthought, but an intricate, reverent reimagining of what may turn out to be The Cure's final studio statement. Delivered by a vast and carefully curated selection of artists, each bringing the full weight of their own legacy to bear, the collection doesn't merely elevate the tracks found on Songs Of A Lost World, but expands on them to create a sprawling double-disc transmission that feels like a farewell to the entire lineage of music that The Cure has helped shape. It is enormous, and utterly absorbing.

From the opening trio - Paul Oakenfold, Orbital, Daniel Avery - you're already witnessing three titans of UK club culture, offering restrained and stately openers with all the mood of a smoke-filled cathedral. You wouldn't instinctively place The Cure at the centre of a techno compilation, yet here they are, utterly at home, their fingerprints visible across the entire spectrum of electronic music. The sense of scale is especially apparent in the final stretch as Chino Moreno, 65daysofstatic, and Mogwai close the record out in towering form with glacial grandeur and emotional weight. This remix album is a reminder that The Cure's influence stretches not just across genres, but generations. There are very few rock bands - maybe none - who can convincingly lay claim to having shaped so many disparate strands of music all while maintaining such a singular identity, and Mixes Of A Lost World is a full-spectrum tribute.



**If you like Godspeed You! Black Emperor, you'll love Birthing by Swans.**

In a career stretching over 40 years, this band has redefined what experimental rock can do, and Birthing feels like the final, enormous exhale. This is a full stop at the end of a monumental chapter. Since the band's rebirth in 2010, albums like *The Seer*, *To Be Kind* and *The Glowing Man* have pushed the limit of sonic intensity, and *Birthing* is the final refinement of that arc, giving you what they've been honing all this time without distractions or interludes, just seven huge pieces, each reaching for something massive. The opening of *The Healers* evokes a hint of *Wish You Were Here*-era Floyd in the slow lift-off, whilst the end of *I Am A Tower* clearly echoes Bowie's *Heroes*, and it feels like these chords are just where one naturally ends up when reaching for something

so beautiful and vast. There are lots of words about birth, death, blood, mothers, fathers, and God, but the point isn't what Michael Gira is saying, but how the words feel when delivered like an incantation. Swans are about the raw psychological impact of sound, with every chord, noise, and lyric built to test how deeply music can shake us. Across its seven sprawling tracks, *Birthing* moves through extraordinary emotional terrain, opening in brooding, smothering darkness, but on the title track everything opens up, and the music feels like sunrise. This is emotional experimentation at the most primal level, which is what Swans have always sought to do. Across their four-decade career, Michael Gira and his collaborators have returned again and again to the question: what can sound do to us? *Birthing* is punishing, beautiful, and the absolute opposite of radio-friendly guitar music.



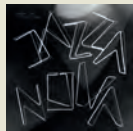
## Jazz & Hip-Hop

### If you like Lauryn Hill, you'll love 10 by SAULT.

The opener sets the tone with a bright, sunburst groove, layering each element until it becomes an explosion of joy, like Kool & The Gang in a candlelit studio, but rather than keep that high energy throughout, 10 dials things down across much of its runtime, finding power in restraint. The vocal palette of 10 is unmistakably grounded in the lineage of late-'90s R&B - a moment in Black culture where female vocal groups held an incredible amount of cultural and emotional space, and the album's harmonies and vocal layering recall a golden era defined by artists like TLC and En Vogue, blending vulnerability with attitude, and packaging emotional truths in arrangements that felt both lush and intimate. If the vocals on 10 are rooted in the silk-threaded harmonies of 1990s R&B, the instrumental bed they rest on draws from the deeper, older well of 1970s soul, disco, and funk with Barry White levels of space and smoothness. There's an undeniable lineage to bands like Earth, Wind & Fire, and The Isley Brothers - ensembles where the presentation was always immaculate. The basslines purr, the percussion breathes, and there's a quiet seduction in the polish, sensual in its restraint rather than sexual in a provocative way. There's not a shred of gangster bravado - just soul, poise, and a deep understanding of the value of restraint.

### If you like Roy Ayers, you'll love In Between Revisited by Jazzanova.

Musically, this sits less in a jazz framework than in a deeply jazz-inflected world of

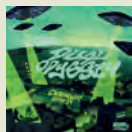


funk, Afrobeat, and breakbeat. Clara Hill's performance on No Use is achingly tender; the

ensemble playing on Mwela, Mwela (Here I Am) conjures a rolling afro-funk groove full of charm and sophistication; Days To Come lands somewhere close to euphoric deep house. Jazzanova may have started out as studio wizards with a deep love of jazz and soul, but here they've become something closer to a classic funk band. It's romantic, intimate, and far more emotive.

### If you like The Four Owls, you'll love Dual Odyssey by Outstraight & Verb T.

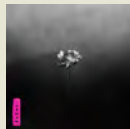
Originally conceived as a one-off collaboration, Dual Odyssey is the sound of UK hip-hop veteran Verb T linking up with the Irish crew Outstraight, and the result was so natural and fun that it turned into a full-blown album and tour! Classic sample-based production moves from smoky, slow-tempo stoner grooves to boisterous, punchy bangers, and like Wu-Tang Clan or M.O.P. every character makes an impression.



With the world currently turning its collective ear towards Irish hip-hop, this is a golden moment for Outstraight, and a wave we should all be riding.

### If you like Kendrick Lamar, you'll love Lotus by Little Simz.

Simz is a short-form rhythmic storyteller with quick bars that never feel rushed, and her stories are personal and specific, but accessible. The way she speaks plainly and passionately about complex emotional terrain makes her a national treasure, accompanied by some of the most lavish, organic, and subtly cinematic production to appear on any hip-hop record this year. While Simz is technically rapping, what she's doing in spirit isn't far from the soul queens of the '70s with a clarity of voice, a command of mood, and a personal gravity that places her alongside the greats.





## *The Scarlett Letter*

# A quid for our future, is it really that complicated?

**It's been 15 months** since the government's Culture, Media and Sport Committee gave the live music industry an ultimatum – agree on a £1 levy on arena and stadium gig tickets to fund grassroots venues, or we'll step in. A deadline of September 2024 was given. Today, a broad industry consensus has still not been reached, meanwhile 150 venues (16% of the total) have closed in the last two years.

This isn't complicated. It's a single quid on a ticket that already costs anywhere from £60 to £160. That's one-tenth of a pint of watery lager at the O2. And yet, the latest data is even more paltry than we thought. As of this summer, not only is the levy on just 8% of 2025 arena tickets, but the number for 2026 shows has dropped to a measly 7.25%. The government's new Creative Industries Sector Plan trumpeted that this levy could deliver up to £20 million a year for the grassroots. The current projection based on this industry-led "agreement"? A laughable £1.8 million for 2025.

Meanwhile, venues at the sharp end – the ones that foster talent, take risks, and form the foundations of the UK's live music scene – are still clinging on by their fingernails. Since 2020, over half of music fans say they've seen an important local grassroots venue or club shut down in their area. This isn't theoretical; it's happening right now, in your neighbourhood.

There has been some progress, and let's give credit where it's due. Artists like Mr Scruff are taking matters into their own hands, completing a tour of tiny venues across the UK and donating £1 from every ticket sold. The LIVE Trust – launched in January – raised over half a million pounds in its first few months from tours like Pulp and Hans Zimmer. The government has also doubled down in its commitment to the levy via the Sector Plan. But, the industry's biggest players continue to

drag their feet. The Culture Minister has put the big players on notice, imploring them to "sign up to the levy as a matter of urgency so that at least a majority of qualifying tickets carry the levy by the end of the year".

There's a clear public mandate here, too. Some 93% of gig-goers support the levy. But while industry behemoths rake in millions through corrupt practices like dynamic pricing, a blanket £1 levy is apparently too much to ask. Enough of the polite nudging. To hit the government's new target, Davyd did the math: over 54% of every single new ticket announced for the rest of this year would need to include the levy. After six months of abject failure, does that sound likely to you?

So let's be blunt. The government has warned it will "reconvene the live music sector to consider legislative options" this Autumn if things don't improve. Mark Davyd of the Music Venue Trust has thrown down an even clearer gauntlet: if the industry hasn't hit at least 30% uptake on 2026 tickets by the end of September, then the attempt to deliver a voluntary levy will have failed. No more extensions. At that point, as Davyd himself has stated, the Music Venue Trust will be compelled to back statutory legislation.

It's time to stop talking about doing the right thing and just do it. £1 per ticket. That's all. Stick it on the price, ring-fence the money, and give our grassroots venues the chance to breathe, book new artists, and – heaven forbid – plan for more than one month at a time.

It's not rocket science. It's common sense. So why's it taking so long?

*Bill Scarlett*





**MORE INFO**

**EVERY 1st FRIDAY**

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DOWNLOAD SLAM DUNK  
READING AND 2000 TREES




# FACE DOWN

**10-6am**  
@ KINGS CROSS  
**SCALA**

**emo. pop punk. metal. rock**

**METAL ROOM ★ EMO KARAOKE ★ CONFETTI CANNONS ★ BALLOONS**  
**BEER MEN ★ 2 PINT CUPS ★ GIVEAWAYS ★ AFTERPARTY TIL 6am**

**3 ROOMS PLAYING MUSIC FROM...**

**FACEDOWNLONDON**   

BLINK 182 ★ BRING ME THE HORIZON ★ 21 PILOTS ★ SLIPKNOT ★ DON BROCO ★ FALL OUT BOY  
BEARTOOTH ★ ALL TIME LOW ★ GREEN DAY ★ SLEEPING WITH SIRENS ★ WATERPARKS ★ FEVER 333  
PARAMORE ★ KORN ★ EVERY TIME I DIE ★ ROYAL BLOOD ★ BURY TOMORROW ★ MGK ★ AVRIL LAVIGNE  
FOO FIGHTERS ★ PARKWAY DRIVE ★ MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE ★ YOU ME AT SIX ★ A DAY TO REMEMBER  
LOATHE ★ BOWLING FOR SOUP ★ THE GHOST INSIDE ★ WHILE SHE SLEEPS ★ NEW FOUND GLORY  
YUNGBLUD ★ PVRIS ★ FOUR YEAR STRONG ★ CREEPER ★ SUM 41 ★ THAT SHREK SONG