

**ALT-J  
YARD ACT  
CAROLINE**

**NILUFER YANYA  
ALFIE TEMPLEMAN  
PORRIDGE RADIO**



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**WETLEG**  
LIFE IS A  
ROLLERCOASTER

# THE MIC

## #53

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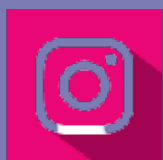
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THE MIC



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# A message from our Managing Director...

Hello and welcome to the 53rd edition of The Mic!

Spring has officially sprung and it's finally warm enough to spend the afternoons in a beer garden with a drink of your choice (and a copy of The Mic).

This issue brings together our most impressive roster of artists to date. You can look forward to interviews with Alfie Templeman, Alt-J, Walt Disco, Yard Act and many more. Of course, topping the bill are our cover stars Wet Leg, who chatted to Editor-in-Chief Joe Hughes in an eclectic interview. Turn to page 21 to hear about their whirlwind lives on tour, and the surreal inspirations behind some of their catchiest tunes. It's not one to be missed!

We also have our usual helping of excellent features- this time including a festival forecast for the summer ahead, album reviews from both our members and committee, and a very interesting opinion piece from Millie Hopcott discussing the invalidation of queer female sexuality in the music industry.

I'm forever impressed by the superb standard of writing our members manage to produce, and I'd like to say a huge thank you to everyone involved with The Mic for making this year absolutely fantastic. I don't take for granted how lucky I am to have had the opportunity to be your Managing Director over the past year. I would like to say a particularly big thank you to our committee for showing incredible devotion and resilience this year- you've all been inspirational, and your hard work and sense of humour does not go unnoticed. I am so excited to hand over to the new committee over the coming months- I have no doubt that they'll do an absolutely sterling job and can't WAIT to see how they manage to make The Mic bigger and better than ever.

Enjoy the magazine!

Hattie



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BUZZARD BUZZARD BUZZARD  
BACKHAND DEALS



“It’s strange how little feeling I actually have for our first record. It’s come out and I’m just like ‘fuck that let’s do something else... the snare’s too fucking quiet”

‘Buzzard Buzzard Buzzard are just a rock band,’ the phrase plastered over billboards across the city of Cardiff. Yet, this classic rock influenced 4 pieces are so much more than what their promotion seems. Backhand Deals flourishes with personality and flamboyance within its eleven-track journey, writes Meg Atkinson. Yet, lyrically, it comes from a socio-political mindset. It delves into the life and opinions of Tom Rees- frontman, writer, and producer of Buzzard Buzzard Buzzard, expelling through song, his life as a young man living in the ever-developing city of Cardiff...But calm down, they are ‘just a rock band.’

And yet even with all this rock and roll hype, bold album design, and witty flair, the morning of the album drop has a slightly less ‘rock’ atmosphere. I’m sitting in an empty seminar room trying to figure out why my headphones aren’t working, while Tom almost resembles the character he plays in the ‘Good Day’ music video, directed by Will Clark who is becoming a staple element in Buzzard’s visual look. Wrapped up in his coat and scarf, Tom isn’t too well, but giving it his all, which actually is quite ‘rock’ really.

First things first, as I am talking to Tom, the album has only been out for a couple of hours, so I ask him how he feels now that the tracks are finally out in the public domain. “I just want to do another one already. It’s been two years so I’m like ‘Okay, it’s out. Cool. Just want to do another one. It’s weird. You change a lot in two years. I mean, anybody does.”

BUZZARD BUZZARD BUZZARD  
BACKHAND DEALS



BUZZARD



"Looking back at songs that I wrote two years ago, it's kind of like 'yeah, I wouldn't probably write those songs now' but that's the fun of being in a band, right? That's all the fun of it. It's out and other people are hearing it for the first time. So that's the most exciting part is having some rejuvenated sense of ego. I'm like 'Oh, cool. Yeah, I forgot how good it was.'

With a new album comes a new music video and this one is for the second track on the record 'Good Day'. I ask Tom about the significance of a track that's filled with irony and dread and one of the best lyrics on the album: 'so you be feeling like Jay-Z, but simultaneously lazy.'

"I think the main overarching thing is how we're obsessed with customer service. I don't know if you ever worked in a bar, but when I used to work at bars, so many people who used to tell me to smile all the time used to just fucking piss me off, so much. It's kind of just about how we're obsessed with that idea of everyone's got to be super happy and like fuckin' doing their job like it's what they want to do the entire time. And it's not the fucking case.

Then, within the substructure of the people who were doing well and actually enjoying their jobs [it turns out] are just somebody's fucking kid, you know! I mean, that's just the vibe. I have to work in a bar with some fucking forty-year-old fucking Taffy bloke with a smile, for some reason. And then I have to look at fucking Yungblud and he's having a great time because his granddad was in T-Rex. Illness really brings out the hatred in me."

From Tom's ill ramblings, I can tell there is this brooding anger and cynicism about the world that informs his writing. He doesn't play it safe, which makes Buzzard's identity so refreshing. Undercutting this anger with irony feels important and chimes with how young people view life. Shit, but making a joke out of it because there is not much else you can do.

Tom reveals to me more about being 'just a rock band.' "I love it. I think the problem is that people don't do that. I write songs about stuff that I believe in, and all that stuff and they have a political edge to it, and they mean stuff to me and whatever. But at the end of it all, we're just a rock band, so people should fucking chill. People should just be like, 'it's okay.'"

"So, that's the caveat with the whole thing. We have things to say, but we're not gonna fucking tie your hands up and make you listen. It's also funny. You can also have a laugh about it."

Tom is so right. The best thing we can do is just laugh. But are Buzzard Buzzard Buzzard the only band doing it? With a scene saturated with suited and booted serious post-punk bands who comment on the world with such an air of seriousness, are there other contenders?

"As much as I respect bands like Fontaines D.C. or Yard Act, I respect those bands, not my cup of tea, but whatever. I just feel like if you have a full day of shit, right? If you have a full day of, 'Russia's invading Ukraine' and bababababa and bababababa, then you think 'it's okay I'm going to a gig tonight.' Then you get to the gig and it's not fucking funny. It's not even remotely funny. I just think



'fuck.' It's just beating you down constantly, you know? It's not a good time. It's just somebody telling you what they think about the price of bitter, it's just like 'God, can we just have a fucking break?' Especially where we're at now. It's insane."

Getting back to the backbone of Backhand Deals, the gentrification of Cardiff city centre. You may be thinking this is very niche, and it is, but the album does represent the distillation of a small city's culture into bright yellow vinyl. Tom tells me about the decline of the city centre, that appears most prominently in 'Crescent Man Vs Demolition Dan' and 'Demolition Song'.

"I think Cardiff, at the moment, unfortunately, is a black hole for culture, [specifically] its own culture. I feel like there's a weird thing going on. Maybe it was in the [19]20s or 30s, or something- I haven't fact-checked out though-

we had loads of canals running through the city. Beautiful vibe. Cardiff Council covered them all up 'canals are a thing of the past. Okay, beauty is a thing of the past.' We just concreted over them, and we still have them running underneath the city, you know."

"There's this weird thing that is like denial of culture in pursuit of something. I feel like a lot of the time, Cardiff Council are trying to compete on a union stage. So, everything they do is 'knock it down, we need to have a big finance hub, big business hub, we need to bring the BBC here,' There's this whole thing where they just keep making moves that try and compete with larger cities like Nottingham, Manchester, Leeds, when you don't have to do it. Like you can just make your own thing. If you contribute to your own culture, your own music scene, your artistic scene, that's what makes people want to come here, not because you have a new fucking bus station."

**"I'm gonna be a wreck by the end of it. Either a wreck or an absolute egomaniac. Both not good."**





"There's a couple of places that are doing stuff by themselves, which is really exciting. We've got a place called Barcareto which is like an Italian charcuterie bar which is run by artists, and everybody works there is an artist, and it's fucking great. And so, people can keep doing stuff like that, then that'd be fucking really cool."

"This is a crazy thing as well; they're opening the canals back up. It's insane. It's so fucking weird. In 20 years, they'll fucking rebuild Gwdihw because there'll be like, 'Oh, we made a mistake. And then they'll knock it down. They're just fucking insane. They're crazy people."

Away from the doom and gloom, it's time to ask Tom some more upbeat questions to drag the mood up from our politically filled heads. I ask him where the name of the album *Backhand Deals* came from. I can tell Tom has this story down to a T and reels off this rhetoric: "We played a lot of online Monopoly. Ethan hates online Monopoly, because he can't cheat, basically. He used to say, 'I wish we could play physical monopoly because he made loads of backhand deals.' That was the vibe. We just thought it was a really funny, and kind of a gross rock name."

Quickfire question time, as the interview comes to an end. Tom tells me about his favourite song on the album. "I think *Faking a Living* is my favourite one just because I wanted to write a song that was just all chorus. It's just four choruses. That was the one and I was really happy. That was right in the middle of when I was feeling fully inspired about writing and stuff like that, which doesn't come around very often. So yeah, really love that one."

Inspirations for writing this song?

"There was this guy playing a scratched up fucking record that he found was by some African band. He apologized because it was all scratched up. As it was going around, it was skipping and crackling. I was just like, 'What the fuck is? This is awful.' But the chorus was just 'like making a living' over and over and over again. I had a joke in my head, on my own when I was in the car, which I felt very proud of. I said aloud and I laughed at myself, which was, 'making a little bit more like freaking living.' Then I thought about how fuckin Tony Blair did that when he invaded Iraq."

How are you feeling about touring, who is supporting you?

"I'm definitely just going to be insanely nervous for the whole fucking thing. So, I'm gonna be a wreck by the end of it. Either a wreck or an absolute egomaniac. Both not good. We've got Panic Shack. We've got fucking Melin Melyn. We've got Ailsa Tully for a couple of them and Alice Low for a couple and we got a band called Dream Machine. All Welsh except for Dream Machine, who I believe are from Brighton."

What's next for Buzzard Buzzard Buzzard?

"It's strange how little feeling I actually have for our first record. It's come out and I'm just like 'fuck that let's do something else.' So, I just want to hit a bit harder if we really get into it. I want the snare to be louder, generally speaking, just little things. I listened to it this morning 'The snare's too fucking quiet."

Even though you could describe Buzzard Buzzard Buzzard as just a rock band from Wales, wanting to bring laughter to its audience through their record or in a live setting, there are so many more layers to what makes them so great and monumental to the sound and social commentary of today.

Meg Atkinson

**"If you contribute to your own culture, your own music scene, your artistic scene, that's what makes people want to come here, not because you have a new fucking bus station."**



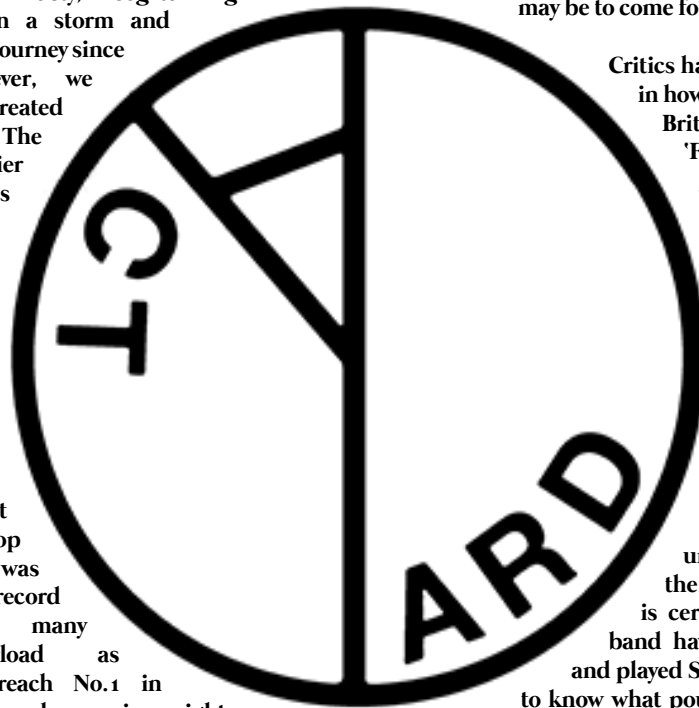
# YARD ACT

Yard Act are developing a reputation for acerbic social commentary in their unique brand of post-punk. Izzy Felton chatted to the band, as they shared their thoughts on touring, their new album, and their admirable audience engagement.

If you are a fan of post-punk, you have most certainly heard about Yard Act. Despite only releasing their first song together back in 2020, the group are now the sweethearts of 6 music and the dads that listen to it. Their tongue in cheek storytelling and rusty, cog-turning instrumentals have gone down a storm and pushed the band on a whirlwind journey since day dot. This year, however, we were lucky enough to be treated to their debut album *The Overload* and I was even luckier to catch up with them just as they finished their UK tour. Sam Shjipstone, lead guitarist, and Ryan Needham, bass guitarist, appeared on Zoom. I just so happened to have seen Yard Act a number of times in the weeks prior, so it kind of felt like I knew them both already. We started by discussing their latest tour which they had just finished. It had been non-stop touring since the album was released, including a rush record store tour to flog as many copies of *The Overload* as possible in an attempt to reach No.1 in the album charts. Twenty shows in eight days and then a regular tour to follow- they were knackered. 'We had to cancel two because James [lead singer] had flipping norovirus,' Sam explained. 'I think it's because he keeps giving the microphone to everybody. He needs to start disinfecting it between every crowd pass.'

Unfortunately, the band just missed out on that No.1 spot, pipped to the post by Years & Years star Olly Alexander, however they still managed to achieve the impressive sounding accolade of having the fastest-selling debut album of any band this century. 'Which sounds grandiose but the 21st century is only 22 years.' Ryan replied. 'In the

first 10 years of that no one was interested in vinyl. So when you actually put it on paper, you've sold a few more records compared to bands in the last four years. I'm not knocking it though, it's still incredible.' I think Ryan was selling the band short. In the past few years, the only other band of their calibre that has been so close to a No.1 is Sports Team, who have since sold out huge venues and headlined festivals. A glimpse at what may be to come for the Leeds band.



Critics have suggested that Yard Act's appeal lies in how their music is so quintessentially

British. I know several Graham's from 'Fixer Upper' and quite a few 'could've-gone-professional-if-it-wasn't-for-the-knee-injury' characters like that in 'Tall Poppies'. Lead singer James Smith's knack at storytelling is something to be admired by listeners and envied by fellow bands. But what sort of reaction does a band so quintessentially British get overseas? They explained that it didn't really take off in America at first but you don't need to fully understand a band to like their songs. 'When I got into N.W.A and stuff like that, I didn't understand every single reference but the energy carries.' Ryan explained. Which is certainly true in their case, as since,

the band have announced a North American tour and played SXSW this March. 'I don't think you have to know what pound shop terracotta frogs are to get the impression of what we're talking about.' Yard Act have also had success in Europe, particularly in Spain and Germany, where they won an award back in September. Accepting the award in Germany, then flying back to the UK and playing Nottingham the very next day. I attended the Dot to Dot set myself; people queuing far down Pelham Street to get a glimpse of the next up-and-coming band and the set itself was one of their best. If there was ever a weekend to make a band feel like they'd made it, for Yard Act, it would be that particular one last September.

'That gig was definitely one where we turned up and were like, "well this is fucking weird". A pinch yourself moment.' Ryan recalled. Despite all being in bands before, the shock of

**“The music that you create, creates the audience. At that show, there was sort of a bad vibe ”**





is a pain, it is clear that the pair love what they do and I found their honesty about life on the road quite refreshing.

We moved onto the record itself. Ryan's favourite track off the debut album being 'Rich', and Sam's being 'Land of the Blind' ('I get to show off') and Tall Poppies, which is also my highlight of *The Overload*. 'Tall Poppies' is a sort of obituary, looking back at the life of a man who lived in a working-class area in the North of England his whole life. The song describes him getting married, having kids and missing out on a football career because of an injury.

The track is where James Smith's talents at lyricism really play out, creating characters real enough to not be stock but broad enough for all of us to know someone like them. Ryan explained that they derive a lot of inspiration for their music from their Northern semi-rural working-class backgrounds and that James looks at people he has met for influence. Sam explained further how there are two schools of thought in a song like 'Tall Poppies'. 'We're all, as I'm sure you are Izzy, quite arty people who need new experiences in our lives. So we end up going to big cities, and not doing things that satisfy other people.' He explained. 'Take me. I'm 36, I don't have a family, I'm not married, I don't have kids and for some people that's a really important life event.' From that perspective, 'Tall Poppies' unpicks what gives different people satisfaction in their lives. Some may listen to the song and see the characters life as undesirable, while others may see it as something they want to achieve. Their music isn't all tongue in cheek.



There was one final topic I wanted to discuss with the duo. A week or so before our chat, Yard Act had posted a statement on their social media regarding an incident of sexual harassment at one of their gigs. The band took a stern approach, telling older male fans in particular that they could 'guarantee with near certainty that young women have absolutely no interest in you as a sexual pursuit'. As a female music fan myself, gigs can often be a tricky place to navigate. But seeing a band take action after an incident at their show was something I, as well as many other women, were happy to see. 'I feel a huge amount of guilt,' Sam explained. 'The music that you create, creates the audience. At that show, there was sort of a bad vibe that you felt even before that person came forward with her experience.' The band approached an organisation called Good Night Out to ask how to deal with the situation and as a result the statement was made. 'Not enough [bands] actually take the time to do that,' Ryan added. More and more venues are putting more in place to keep fans safe in their venues and Yard Act have proved that bands can help too but making it clear they have a zero tolerance for inappropriate behaviour.

We finished on a lighter note: what was next for the band. Album two is on the cards. 'It might be a weird one, get ready' Sam joked. Getting out there, playing gigs, working on how to play better as a band. It seems like Yard Act are ready for the hundreds of shows they have ahead, despite their laundry concerns.

Izzy Felton

becoming so popular doesn't seem to go away completely. 'We've all played in bands where you play somewhere and there might be eight people there. You just don't know what's going to connect really. It's kind of like black magic.' Sam noted that he knew the band were big during their latest tour. 'One marker for me was that in the last week of this tour, every day someone has asked me if I've had a haircut.' Who knows, by next year maybe Sam's hair will feature on the cover of *OK! Magazine*. I wondered if being in bands before has helped them at all with this catapult to success? 'Yeah, it does help,' Sam agreed. 'I'm taking things for granted a bit more than I should be, I think.' Ryan looked puzzled on the other end of the zoom call and asked my next question for me. What things do you take you for granted, Sam? 'I'm sort of moaning about going to America for two weeks. How am I going to do laundry? But then I tell myself fuck off. This is good!' However much laundry

# ALBUM REVIEW:

## BIG THIEF

# 'DRAGON NEW WARM MOUNTAIN I BELIEVE IN YOU'

'Dragon in the new warm mountain, didn't you believe in me.' Adrienne Lenker planted the seed of Big Thief's joyous opus in her stunning 2020 solo endeavour, *Songs*; a magically sprawling exploration of grief, divorce and self-love. With the cancellation of Big Thief's 2020 tour and the divorce of founding members Lenker and Buck Meek, *Songs* invites the listener into Lenker's emptiness, to sit and make oneself comfortable with loss as she did, spending four months in a cabin recording the works to tape. It's this crucial context that makes *Dragon New Warm Mountain I Believe In You (DNWMIBIY)* such a joyful triumph.

As bountiful and ambitious as the 20-track album is, one need look no further than the hand drawn doodle on the cover to understand its sentiment. Four whimsical creatures in smudged pencil sit around the fire with their instruments, a self-portrait of the band in Lenker's image. The album was recorded in four main sessions, as the band penned 45 songs post 2020, handpicking 20 of these to make up *DNWMIBIY*. The album flies no flags, makes no proclamations and pushes no agenda. Gliding across genre and tonal palette, with the hay-chewing country Jam 'Spud Infinity' straddled by the downtempo 'Change' and the dreamlike haze of the title track, the listener is invited to observe the overflowing love of the project, as a chosen family of rockers celebrate their survival.

*DNWMIBIY*'s potentially scattered sound worlds are united by an essential aspect of Big Thief's sound: Adrienne Lenker. Every song on the album was written by the frontwoman, with her trademark weaving of vivid nature, relationships and life's big questions united by the remaining members of the band. Producer James Krivchena, who dabbles in his own experimental projects, as well as penning percussion for every Big Thief record thus far, allowed Lenker to focus on the core of each track on the album, leaving a tracklist built upon impenetrable lyricism peppered with ear candy.

For this 20 track exploration to be in any way compelling, the order of events is a crucial consideration. Compared to the band's previous successes, *DNWMIBIY* presented a new challenge. How does one package almost two dozen songs without any grand overarching concept or traditional structure? The album flow is seamless and impeccable, jumping from downtempo reflections to folky fun and experimental detours. Side B could have easily contained all the folky bangers, whilst side D trailed off into Lenker-esque musings, but instead the constant variation in style keeps the listener stimulated. Big Thief somehow manage to infatuate for 80 minutes without putting down a guitar.

Album highlight and single 'Simulation Swarm' acts as a presentation of Big Thief's winning formula. A typically tricky-sounding fingerpicked guitar part acts as the foundation, with Adrienne's croon conjuring images of mystically subversive nature; 'magnet sun... empty horses... winged creatures gathering in silken height,' and so on. A drum kit played with the softness of a tiptoe brightens up the tune, with Krivchena's nuanced recording highlighted again here. The track's low end works to highlight the guitar part, whilst a secondary bass part slinks and slides across decorations, added to by plonky guitar harmonics and distortions. The unorthodox guitar solo was a part I assumed to be coined by one of the dedicated instrumentalists of the group, but Lenker managed to perform the solo flawlessly live, complete with harmonic taps, spritely rhythms and continued chords, despite playing on a single acoustic guitar. 'Simulation Swarm' is an Adrienne Lenker song at heart, but is elevated to a new form by Big Thief.

'Heavy Bend' sounds like the band dipping their toe into the world of lo-fi, with 'Blurred View' taking this further into a place of melancholic soundings. 'Wake Me Up To Drive' retorts the listener from any sense of sadness, as a cute-as-a-button vocal performance proclaims excitement for a cross-country drive, as the entire track sounds as if it was run through the soundsystem of a Jeep. These interjections break up potential familiarities between the track, lending a freshness to each instrumental change. *DNWMIBIY*'s sense of fun seeps into the more produced tracks on the album, often disembodied from the rock band image present throughout. Take the huge, floating sound of 'Little Things', the echoed vocals and euphoric climax of 'Time Escaping' or the comedically perfect singalong of 'No Reason'. These tracks are unmistakably Big Thief in their similarities, but act as one point of the axis on which the band turn. Combine these with the comparatively intimate acoustic tracks played solely by Lenker and the full range of the band is exposed. Adrian ponders her mortal power on *Promise is a Pendulum*, comparing this to the grandiose promise of love: 'I could never build the ether or the grass overgrown... I could never make a freckle or the warm breath you sigh.' *The Only Place* is a euphoric proclamation of love in itself, but given the context of Lenker's album *Songs*, it becomes an episode of hope and rebirth, showing she is capable of love again: 'If all material scatters and ash is amplified, the only place that matters is by your side.' By stripping the band away, one can appreciate the way in which the members of Big Thief elevate each other, and the joy this brings.

Having analysed the track-list in search of a deeper concept or overarching meaning to *Dragon New Warm Mountain I Believe in You*, I find comfort in the fact that I couldn't find one. The album is deeply joyous and fun, intimate in a way that the listener is welcomed into what sounds like a safe space, with no expectation of understanding or analysis, instead invited to sit back and enjoy the music. Despite the live recording of the album, Big Thief sound as if they don't play to any particular audience, instead enjoying the beauty of music in a private space and revelling in the shared experience. I find myself returning to the cover art, the childlike comfort and timeless image of friends round the fire singing a tune. The title track summarises *Dragon New Warm Mountain I Believe in You* perfectly: 'it's a little bit magic.'

Pinegrove was built on a sensitive blend of lyrical poeticism and creative indie-rock licks. There's always a divine equilibrium of aesthetic coolness and emotional delicacy in their albums that separates them from many of their contemporaries. The past few years have seen an evolution from singer Evan Stephen Hall, as changes ranging from the pandemic to deep-rooted issues in American politics have required more urgently considerate works of music. Hall's penchant for writing passionately direct, literate, and introspective tracks, have proven themselves to be continuously political and socially conscious in their new album *11:11*.

When reflecting on my sense of catharsis while listening to the recent album, I questioned Hall's own experience of writing and emotional journey. He responds that *11:11*, much like the other albums, was in its barest form, an account of the "sorts of things I was thinking about and the ways in which I found to process them". Yet it would be a mistake to take the album "too autobiographically". What Hall was hoping to do was to "smash or smush" all the various things he was thinking about what his friends were saying and what he heard on the news into a more "archetypal story arc-type thing". The band weaves critiques, thoughts and personal experiences through their tracks without ever being too didactic.



He made clear his belief that 'the way songs operate, and the way life operates are kind of two different things. Music appears as an "element of translation". Within this process of translation, Hall wishes to broaden the possibilities of his songs - their sites of interpretation, double meanings, or analogies. The influences of literature and the idea of storytelling are clear on Pinegrove's work, with previously stated influences being George Saunders, William Faulkner, and Virginia Woolf. The multiple layers of reading in his songs are James Joyce-esque, especially with this album and its title – *11:11*.

# Pine –



Hall has spoken repeatedly about the twisting nature of the album's title, and it was certainly something I wanted to cover in this interview. "Well, I took it initially as just as a very visual thing. I've always liked *11:11*. From when I was a kid". A seemingly American tradition that when the two numbers appear together, are lucky. Any fans of numerology will know that the day is full of potential for wish-granting – especially when the clock strikes *11:11*. 'Make a wish for a better future' – is incredibly apt for this album.

He went on to say that there is equally a "visual semantic layer." The repeating line, to Hall, can appear as an overarching symbol of patterns in general, or as an ode to art. In a way, it symbolises the ways that art can "comfort and galvanise us, that it can push us inwards and push us outwards. And in certain ways, it's a self-titled record – it's four trees, it's a Pinegrove... it's people shoulder to shoulder, who are either marching in solidarity of black lives or the impending marches that we are going to need for climate action." It could be "members of an audience who are singing."

With this many interpretations with the title, imagine how many there are in the actual tracks. Overall – whatever you find in the title – Hall hopes that listeners can "feel a little bit more courageous to be themselves or to fight for a society that includes everybody." He states that this is one of the most abstract processes of writing – the desire to galvanise. He hopes he can, and he's aware other bands can do as well. There's certainly a belief there that through this community of music, bands "can try and triangulate the message. Or something like that."

Talking of other bands, I thought it would be a good opportunity to ask him about his musical inspirations. The album sees the band build on their mixture of indie rock, folk, and alt-country, along with Hall's earnest, open-hearted vocals. His evolution as an artist has only made his resolve grow in strength, and I wondered whether it was with any help from this community of music, he had mentioned. "I'm listening to Plans by Death Cab for Cutie. I have this booklet of CDs from my neighbour. When I was in middle school, down the street I saw that she was throwing away all of her CDs. It's a booklet with all her handwriting on it - that she made for her friends, some of who are my friends too. It's incredibly nostalgic." He also noted more recent releases — such as Earl Sweatshirt. "I think that he is rhyming in many new ways". He admires the use of "poly rhythm with rhyme, with different rhythms on top of each other, and interlocking." "We can definitely see that Hall's lyricism has bumped up a notch from his previous albums. He explores these 'possibilities' in musical experimentation, in a way that is incredibly gripping.



Musical prowess aside, it is arguable to say that the most important feature of the album is the political and social messages. "There's a lot of very important messages in this album. Do you see music as a sort of protest? Because I know you said that 'Orange' isn't about proving anything. You know, it isn't about proving climate change is real, but it's to connect with those people who are worried and have those strong feelings about government inaction. Would you say that your more politicised songs are less about persuading people but more about reaching out? "Yeah, I think that's right! I also think that time for debate about climate change is just absolutely over! The science has been clear since the 80s. Exxon Mobil knew it in the 80s. Now BP has been engaged in widespread disinformation PR campaigns, to make us believe that it's the consumer's fault."



# - Grove

It's clear that Hall's energy isn't exerted in convincing anyone - actually he has no energy for that at all. "If you're not a climate scientist I don't really care what you have to say!" He goes on to share his dissent on the "green capitalist responses to the issue. Like 'oh well all you need to do is buy an electric car'. When really we need a much broader public transit infrastructure. We've been persuaded that 'we' should be taking care of it and I'm not saying we shouldn't be aware of our diet and you know the amount of electricity and water we're using. But really it isn't about us. It's about the top ten companies in the world responsible for carbon emissions."

This advocacy is seen throughout all of Hall's social and public sphere. In his press release he stated: In his press release he stated: "I'm encouraged that so many people in my generation are now on board for a change that centers people over profit. And most urgently, I think, in order to durably solve the climate crisis we've got to address capitalism." There's a certain debate that people with a public platform should use that platform to raise issues and bring attention to certain causes. Do you see it as your responsibility, as a public figure to use your voice for something that matters? "Well, you know I see it as more of my responsibility as a citizen, than through any sort of platform I have".

This is not to say he isn't aware of his privilege to have a platform, and he does want to use it. He understands that 'responsibility' means different things to different artists. He focuses on using it as an opportunity to be able to talk about the thing that matters to him. And one of them takes the form of 'pre-emptive mourning' as seen in single 'Alaska'. "I agree there are so many songs about heartbreak. Why add another to the pile? We're so much more likely to have mixed emotions than we are just a single one. And so for me an interesting song is something where there's a little bit of tension about the mood. Maybe it's a mood that isn't stationary, it's in transit." He admits he likes songs like that, but can't judge whether he achieves that himself. I think he does.

For interview with such thought-provoking answers, I thought I'd ease out of it with the mandatory post-lockdown questions. Generic I know, but have somehow become customary in any conversation with artists in recent years. Now a journalist must, along with "I absolutely adored [insert body of work here]" and "Can you tell us a little more about [this person] you're dating".

"I can't wait. I can't wait", gushes Hall "I love playing in England, in the mainland. We might eventually play in Japan which is a dream. But I'm just happy that you know to have concerts booked at all, especially since we've got new songs to play!" Hearing them play live sounds like a one in a lifetime experience. Hall stated that the band always try and rearrange music live. They don't want to recreate the record – "you already have the record". And you really can't argue with that.

Has your creative outlook changed over the past couple of years, through these struggling times for artists? Do you think the music you've put out recently has differed in any way from your early work? "Well I always try to respond to the prior work in the new work and to build on it. I am somewhat surprised that after eleven years of putting out songs as Pinegrove that there's still more things to say. You know we keep learning and we keep pushing each other and keep getting exposed to new and interesting art. And it's so so exciting to try to make new formulations."

**"Art can comfort and galvanise us, it can push us inwards and push us outwards"**

**"A divine equilibrium of aesthetic coolness and emotional delicacy"**



Interestingly, the album actually contains a few songs that were written in previous contexts but that Hall no longer connected to. Thankfully for us, they didn't go to the cutting board, discarded to never be heard from again – he did a bit of renovation, so that they fit what he was trying to say. This is especially interesting in regards to opening track Habitat. Originally recorded as b-side for 'Cardinal', Hall no longer liked the lyrics and put the track aside. Yet when returning found himself drawn to the "melodic gestures that I may have moved away from but were happy to return to after some distance". Interestingly, the first part was resurrected, while the second was written and recorded after they'd finished the basic tracks of the album – they "added melodies, looped it". It was therefore "built like no other song we've tried before. Simultaneously the oldest and newest song on an album and as such an act as an overture, terrarium where all of the ideas are introduced in that tune." And what a fantastic concoction to start an album with.

Maia Gibbs



# ARTIST SPOTLIGHT



dizzy parade

IZZY COLE



**From poutine to anxiety to new music, Millie Hopcott catches up with indie sweetheart Alfie Templeman.**

WHAT'S IT ALL  
ABOUT

ALFIE TEMPLEMAN?

With the sun shining and Alfie Templeman's new single 'Broken' in my headphones, I was very excited to interview one of my favourite artists. Then just like that, he popped onto my computer screen like a ball of energy, and with a huge smile on his face! Alfie told me about his day off and how well his tour is going. Despite his bassist's amp blowing up on his last tour date, he was in good spirits because of the nice weather.

After four tour dates in Newcastle, Glasgow, Leeds and Manchester, Allie said that he was settling into his UK tour, having lots of fun on the road, with the crowds all being "top-notch". Anyone who follows Allie on Instagram will have seen the stories of excited fans jumping around, shouting the lyrics. As one of his upcoming tour dates is in Nottingham at the Rescue Rooms, I asked Allie if he was looking forward to playing in Nottingham, to which he replied, "Ah mate, it's gonna be great, I love Rescue Rooms it's wicked". He went on to say how he really likes the layout of Rescue Rooms and how the stage is quite high up, making it a good venue to play. Clearly, Rescue Rooms has the Allie Templeman seal of approval!

Talking more about Nottingham, I asked him if he had ever been to any bars and clubs in Nottingham when he'd played here before. He replied with a laugh, saying that he'd never had the chance before as he'd always been under 18. This made me realise how quickly Allie has already become a well-known indie name by the age of 19- it is very impressive! Allie went on to explain his busy tour schedule, saying how just one week of this current tour would have been the entire tour in previous years; unsurprisingly, he said he was going to be "knackered".

"I just made a lot of things that made me happy. That's the only reason you should put stuff on a record"



Recently touring across America with good friend Chloe Moriondo, Allie told me about his time travelling across the country. "They eat a lot of bad food" was the first thing he said, "It's meant to be really good food, but I think a lot of it sucked, and it's really expensive", I didn't expect food to be the first thing to come to his mind, but it made me smile to think that this was the first, authentic thought he had when I brought up America. Speaking more about food, Allie told me about eating poutine which-for those of you like me who had no idea what it was- is chips (or fries) with gravy and cheese curds on top; apparently, a very popular dish. Allie really liked it, though and said it felt "kinda Northern". Going back to the music, he spoke of how he played in some very famous venues in America, such as The Bowery Ballroom in New York and The Roxy Theatre in Hollywood, which were both "really cool" according to the Bedford boy. What wasn't so cool, he said, was the jet leg which lasted "for like three weeks", but he said it was definitely worth it.

Chatting more about his music, I asked him what his upcoming album *Mellow Moon* will be about when released on 27th May. "There's definitely loose themes throughout it, but it's not a conceptual kinda concept record or anything, it's more like, I just made a bunch of really good songs that I enjoy. A lot of them are meant to be about my mental health and what's going on in my life, but at the same time, I just made a lot of things that made me happy and music that I wanted to put on a record, just because I wanted to put it on a record. That's the only reason you should put stuff on a

record." Evidently a very genuine and down to earth artist, he follows his emotions and 'goes with the flow'. Talking more about his imminent album, Allie explained how the 14 tracks all have different vibes; some songs are more "poppy", whereas some have R&B, Leon-Bridges-inspired vibes.

Others have a prog-rock emphasis, and some, Allie said, even have bits of jungle included. This sounds like a very exciting adventure to listen to for his first full-length record! Allie has tweeted about how he becomes "pretty anxious after shows" and sometimes finds it difficult to speak to people after the gig. I thought it was really good seeing someone whom people admire speaking about their struggles with mental health, something we all relate to. With Allie being a younger man, I think it is so important for other young lads to hear him talk about these issues. "I get so bad before gigs as well like people talk to me and I blank them 'cos I'm so anxious, like I dunno what's going on. But as soon as I step up on stage, I'm fine, but then I come back off, and I'm like, 'Oh shit, it's not over yet'. I do want to go out and talk to people, but then at the same time, there's some kind of barrier or something stopping me being more comfortable about it." We discussed how anxiety and worrying about making eye contact, for example, is a relatable experience for many.

On finishing the interview, I asked what his favourite songs to play live were. Ironically, he said, the least favourite of songs he's released are his favourite ones to play live because they are the more 'poppy' songs that people are most familiar with and love singing along to. 'Everybody's Gonna Love Somebody' and '3D Feelings' stuck out the most for him. So, if you're lucky enough to be seeing him live any time soon, expect these songs to go crazy!

Millie Hopcott

"I come back off stage,  
and I'm like, 'Oh  
shit, it's not over yet'"

# THE MIC RECOMMENDS

'III - YUCKY DUSTER

Yucky Duster, indie rock band from Brooklyn who make songs that are too irreverent to be called quaint, but lack the gravity to be actually rude, joined a record label, released a 5-track EP and promptly broke up in 2018. Their posthumous album, III, released in 2021, gets right back to the bright, twee instrumentation, snazzy production and melodic sound that drew ears to their initial releases. III contains petty songwriting and boy/girl harmonies that are bright enough to catch your eye, but not so sweet as to sicken.

HAL HEWITT

'ANTS FROM UP THERE - BLACK COUNTRY NEW ROAD

Expertly crafted and earnest, quite possibly album of the year already and it's only been out for three months. Such a shame lead singer Isaac is no longer in the band, his lyricism and voice is undoubtedly the best in the post-punk scene. A bittersweet, emotionally crushing masterpiece that will no doubt be talked about for years.

LUKE BOWER

'THE UNRAVELING OF PUP THE BAND - PUP

Introduced by two punchy pop-punk singles, 'Kill Something' 'Waiting', PUP's fourth album exceeds expectations. 'A robot writes a love song' is a postmodern take on human emotions, with the new addition of synth, piano and horns to PUP's music. The new album delivers an angry and mind-bending sound and themes in line with their recent redesign

KERENZA HUDSON

'TBA - SLIPKNOT

Slipknot have been teasing their seventh release for about a year now, and I for one could not be more excited. Newly release single 'Chapelton Rag' was a real throwback to their harsher, heavier era, and have confirmed this album will be as heavy as anything they have previously released. I expect this to be my album of the year, and I'm sure if you give it a listen upon release it will be one of yours too

JAKE LONGHURST

'AND EVERYBODY ELSE SMILED BACK - BEARS IN TREES

Sweet, poetic lyrics act as an uplifting ode to the people you love and lose as you grow up. A beautifully earnest exploration into the complexity and challenges of life, and the aftermath of all the good and bad moments we experience.

LUCAS MANNION

'ONCE TWICE MELODY - BEACH HOUSE

Now onto their eighth album, fans know what to expect from the dream-pop due. Victoria Legrand's distinctive vocals instantly mark Once Twice Melody out as a Beach House record, but their further sonic experimentation (most evident of 'Runaway' and 'New Romance') shows a progression from their previous discography. Being a mighty eighteen track set-piece, it is a commitment to listen to in its entirety, but the length only serves to elongate the hazy dream-like state the album puts you in.

RHIANNA GREENSMITH

'GIVE ME THE FUTURE - BASTILLE

The feel-good factor is at the forefront of Bastille's new futuristic fourth album Give Me The Future. Tracks such as 'Back to the Future' and 'Shut Off the Lights' present listeners with upbeat and catchy melodies. To create an otherworldly atmosphere within the album Bastille utilise electronic sounds and also text-to-speech to imitate modern technology like Siri. The album overall highlights the modern technological world we live in that can consume, overwhelm or even inspire us.

EMILY CAMPBELL

'UNLEARNING - WALT DISCO

In between donning a false moustache and digging out your whoopee cushion, make time to wrap your ears around 'Unlearning', the debut album from avant-garde art-rockers Walt Disco. The New Romantic flair of their releases thus far has garnered the Glaswegian 6-piece comparisons to the likes of Marc Bolan and Bowie. Here, the fairground-esque interpolation of lead single 'How Cool Are You?' hints at a record which, akin to a funhouse hall of mirrors, distorts these familiar references points into something new, exciting, and joyously off-kilter.

DAISY CARTER

'ROGUE CARPET DISASTER - STATIC DRESS

'MySpace emo' is back with an electric twist. Static Dress is one of the most exciting and dynamic groups emerging, self-releasing punchy anthems at breakneck speed. Creative icons, they direct their own videos, they style themselves... Olli Appleyard's Static Dress is not just a band but also a project, an immersion. Their upcoming debut album, rouge carpet disaster is expected to launch them into the stratosphere.

JODIE AVERIS

'CRASH' - CHARLIXCX

HyperPop queen Charli XCX has been teasing fans and promising a killer release in Crash, collaborating so far with major artists such as Rina Sawayama and Christine and The Queens, respectively, as well as teasing further fan-demanded collabs. An artist who is incredibly in touch with her craft and fan/social reception, Crash will undoubtedly be amongst the most iconic releases in her repertoire.

LUCY GRAY

### 'SHOALS'- PALACE

London blues-rock band Palace have consolidated their claim for the prize of most underrated band in Britain with their enchanting third album – Shoals. An underwater vibe undercurrents throughout the album, with Palace continuing to take inspiration from nature as they have done with previous projects. Stand-out songs are 'Where Sky Becomes Sea' and 'Friends Forever'.

BENEDICT WATSON

### 'UNLIMITED LOVE'- RED HOT CHILLI PEPPERS

Funk rock legends Red Hot Chili Peppers are back with Unlimited Love! John Frusciante returns to the band's lineup like a deity rising once more to bless us with bountiful melodies. Frusciante's reappearance has excited many fans due to the rock legend devising many of RHCP's iconic riffs like 'Under the Bridge' and 'Californication'. With old legends reuniting and the latest single 'Black Summer' whetting the appetite for more, Unlimited Love is a phenomenal addition to the already remarkable discography of RHCP.

ROBBIE SIMMS

### 'THE DREAM'- ALT-J

Alt-J's fourth album The Dream is brewed with the flavourings of art house instrumentation, self-amusing lyricism and concept-driven storytelling. Their eccentric take on writing is ever present in this album – covering themes of love, happiness, death, and betrayal. The Dream sees a repeat of their penchant for bouncing around a plethora of styles per song, Joyce-esque narrative and pop-culture allusions – it is definitely a must-listen, and great album for the start of 2022.

MAIA GIBBS

### 'FRAGMENTS'- BONOBO

After the lush acoustic textures of 2013's The North Borders and the dynamic housey melancholia of 2017's Migration, Si, 'Bonobo' Green's Fragments is a record informed less by a hectic life of touring and DJing, than a meditative existence exploring the natural world around pandemic gripped-LA. Like the album art suggests about the record, it immerses you in a cleansing cold-water river of cerebral modular synthesizers, harps, and drum patterns that evolve with unparalleled subtlety. It should be enjoyed not for the presence of many standout club-hits, but for its introversion, attention to detail, and his immeasurable talent in inventing a musical style equivalent to a breath of fresh air.

CARADOC GAYER

### 'PEOPLE THOUGHT MY WINDOWS WERE STARS'- DEATHCRASH

Ok, so it's not an album – rather, an 'album length EP' – but I'm cheating so that I can mention this incredible and daring release from London slowcore band deathcrash. Characterised by contrasting moments of distortion and downbeat guitar melodies, this introspective and cinematic piece contains some truly refreshing and original sounds. A master class in space, phrasing and sound scaping, 'Songs for M', 'i-iv' will mesmerise you with its delicate guitar interplay and minimalist writing, whilst the beautiful 15-minute title track People thought my windows were stars delivers a carefully curated mix of melancholic and musical depth. On this EP, deathcrash manage to deliver two entirely different scenarios – the first, you're laid tranquilly staring at the stars, and the next you're being pulled relentlessly under icy, white-water rapids – in a haunting contradiction that will have you re-listening from the start in order to figure out just exactly how they did it.

TOM LIVERSIDGE

### 'THE DEATH OF PEACE OF MIND'- BAD OMENS

A metal album infused with romantic harmonies and obscure experimental sounds, Bad Omens' THE DEATH OF THE PEACE OF MIND leads the race to define the sound of heavy music in 2022. Flirting with ominous soundscapes as well as powerful riffs and cutting percussion, the band mystify us in a 53-minute thriller that culminates in its penultimate song, 'ARTIFICIAL SUICIDE'. The highs and lows of the metal soundscape precede an unpredictable turn in the bridge followed by mere seconds of total silence, suggesting the short time we have in life for self-reflection; once we embrace it, we can move towards 'Miracle', the apt name of the album's ultimate song.

ROXANN YU

### 'DON'T FORGET TO LOOK UP'- MAVERICK SABRE

Arguably his best album yet, Maverick Sabre's latest release, Don't Forget to Look Up, is a stunning showcase of his soulful vocals and clever, often poetic, lyrics. A concoction of different genres, it mixes R&B, soul and funk, and emanates an irresistible yet humble charm. The Irish musician's mellifluous tones harmonize over tracks with relatable themes such as love, heartache and Sabre's endeavor to be a better person.

MILLIE HOPCOTT

### 'MOMENTS'- JAMIE WEBSTER

Scouse sensation of BOSS Night fame Jamie Webster returns with his second studio album Moments, an indie folk adventure full of working class heart. Opening track 'Davey Kane' stands out as Webster delivers an emotional critique of the British justice system, posing the question 'Would it be such a circus if we tried to educate them?'. This is an honest project full of tunes ripe and ready for Webster's headline slot at Liverpool's M&S Bank Arena in November.

JAMES PEUTHERER

# THE MIC RECOMMENDS

# Porrridge Radio

It was full steam ahead towards the release of their third album in May, as lead singer Dana Margolin was “sucked into some admin” -it’s not all rock and roll. Rhianna Greensmith gives Dana a brief reprieve to discuss all things Porrridge Radio.

At the time of writing, the Brighton band are in the middle of their European tour. “We haven’t really been to Europe much because of everything,” reflects Margolin, “so it’s really great to be able to play these shows. Just yesterday we got the train from Copenhagen to Aarhus in Denmark, and the whole journey was just beautiful landscape for three hours, staring out the window”.

Margolin expresses gratitude for the opportunities to travel that being in a band affords her. “Even beyond the fact it’s unbelievable to me that people are listening to our music all over the place, it’s amazing that we actually get to go to these places and see them. The further away a place is, the more exciting it is,” listing Japan, Australia, and the US as dream gig locations.

*Waterslide, Diving Board, Ladder To The Sky* follows the band’s Mercury Prize nominated second record *Every Bad*. “To me this album feels like a natural progression”, Dana considers, “we are still very much the same band, but I think we have progressed, and grown a lot. We’ve really given a lot of time and effort to the finer details of this record.”

I was intrigued by the structure of the title and felt the need to ask its origins. “It came from a few different ideas”, Margolin responds, “I had been doing a lot of painting and drawing over the past few years whilst we were not touring, and images of waterslides, diving boards, and ladders kept reappearing. You can reduce it down to this idea of a waterslide reflecting joy and playfulness, a diving board representing fear and risk, and a ladder as this idea of infinity and endlessness.” She states that by the end she had a huge body of art that worked with the songs the band had been recording so it all “fit together very nicely.”

This insight into the meaning of the title is quite telling of the record thematically, but Dana goes on to elaborate. “There’s a lot in there about being in a band and about being somebody who makes things. There’s also a lot about interpersonal relationships, both platonic and romantic. Heartbreak features a fair bit. I think there is a lot of existential dread in there.” She laughs, “I guess all of the classic things!”

Dana Margolin’s creative talent across various media creates an interesting dynamic in which “everything is influenced by everything”. Margolin reflects that no matter whether she is writing, drawing, or singing, it is constantly influencing her other creative outlets.





# Porridge Radio

The first teasing of the new record came in the form of lead single *Back To the Radio*, which positions itself lyrically as a cathartic release of emotion. The fourpiece released an accompanying music video featuring the band (Georgie Stoff on keyboard, Sam Yardley on drums and Maddie Ryall on bass) playing in an artistic scene. When asked about the influences of these visuals Dana comments, "I was particularly influenced by the surrealist artist Eileen Agar. She has a collage containing an image of a diving board that really captured my imagination. There were also other elements in there like waves and angels and just this kind of dream-like landscape. I was also captivated by William Blake's paintings and a really great Marc Chagall painting of Jacob's Ladder from the Old Testament."

The music video was directed by Dana's sister Ella Margolin. "She's an amazing visual artist as well as a dancer, a ceramicist, and a director," says Dana, "I'm really close with my sister, we are friends and creative collaborators, and I go to her with a lot of my ideas. This collaboration definitely grew organically. She was a really big part of the process of the artwork I was making, and she was listening to mixes of the album as we went along which she was excited about. She pitched an idea for the music video, and we all loved it, so it made a lot of sense for her to direct."

But creative collaboration is not a new thing for the Margolin sisters. "Ella is 5 years younger than me, and I remember when we were younger, we used to play art lessons. I'd just sit down with her and draw a picture or something, but it was quite formative for us in being creative and having fun together. I don't know if we were in a particularly artistic environment", comments Margolin, "but we made our environment creative naturally through having an interest in art." Looking to the rest of 2022, Dana says her goal is just to end it feeling happy, healthy, and strong. "I think it's a really exhausting lifestyle and I really want my band and myself to end the year feeling good."

Porridge Radio have their album dropping in May followed by an in-store tour, their fair share of festivals this summer, and a big UK tour in Autumn. With an album on the horizon that has everything from Deftones to Charli XCX cited as sonic influences, we can surely expect 2022 will be a big year for Porridge Radio.

*Waterslide, Diving Board, Ladder To The Sky* arrives on 20th May via Secretly Canadian.

Rhianna Greensmith



WET



LEG



The album is out. They're touring the globe. Hester Chambers and Rhiann Teasdale are on the rollercoaster ride of their lives. Joe Hughes follows the dizzying twists and turns in the wonderful world of WET LEG.

Their debut hit, and certified earworm, 'Chaise Longue' was difficult to avoid last summer. But, after such an immediate boost in popularity, the band's self-titled album, WET LEG could prove the real test. Reaching across a broad range of themes, it's an ode to the stupefying tedium of modern life- and the pleasure we find in it. Above their breezy indie rock sound, deadpan vocals speak erudite and absorbing lyrics.

Our interview, a few weeks ahead of release, seemed the perfect opportunity to ask how they're dealing with the secrecy and suspense of such a hotly anticipated album. "From our side we don't see or feel the hype, because we're so in it," Chambers blithely remarks. In the middle of a publicity blitz, from their Brixton base (not the serenity of their native Isle of White), being in the eye of the storm evidently agrees with them; the pair seem nonplussed by the prospect of success, basking in it and merely expressing their pure excitement that more of their music will soon be released into the world. It's a level of relative fame that they might not enjoy much longer if their album triumphs as it's set to. Rhian and Hester are modest in acknowledging this: "Not many new bands get the opportunity to cocoon themselves in the studio without the noise and opinions of the outside world."

With their characteristically offbeat charm, and decidedly giddy telephone manner, Chambers and Teasdale make for the most fascinating (and oftentimes frustrating) interviewees. Fascinating on account of their unique aesthetic. And only mildly frustrating out of a journalistic difficulty to tease out any serious reflection on their rapid rise to fame or any sober opinion on their newfound industry acclaim. Chambers elaborates though that "it is quite strange, talking to the press about our music", hinting at the fact that dealing with stardom can be as unsettling an experience as rewarding. Strange indeed was the interview Chambers and Teasdale gave to Radio 5 Live shortly after our slot, when host Nihal Arthanayake struggled to get a cogent sentence out of either of them.

Perhaps this surreal act is in part a way of dealing with an often all-too-earnest music press, an expression of weariness in their third week of album promotion. It was rather refreshing to hear a seasoned interviewer, with some admittedly penetrating questions, come up against the duo's ambivalent deflections and excruciating moments of dead air; Chambers and Teasdale were clearly having fun even if the host wasn't. Ours was a remarkably swift interview in the middle of a jam-packed press day- you have to be invited into their eccentric world, and be able to stay on their quirky wavelength long enough if you don't want to get left behind.

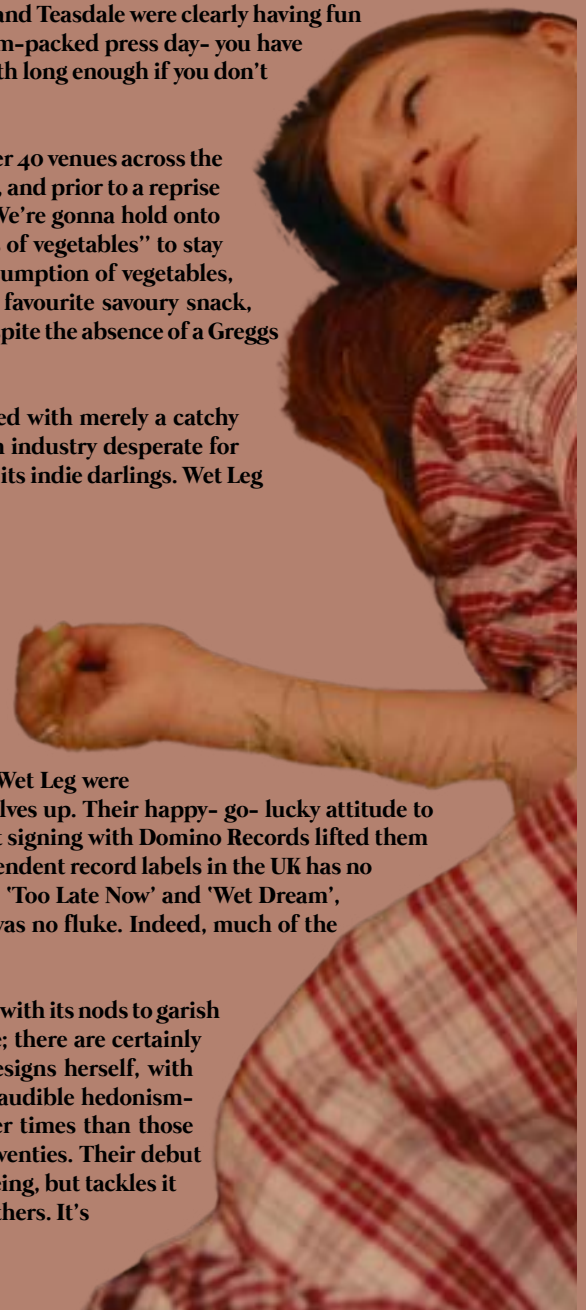
Wet Leg are currently embarked on a rigorous tour, with a schedule that includes over 40 venues across the USA, Europe and UK. All before the festival season gets into full swing this summer, and prior to a reprise of the UK tour in the autumn. Chambers knows they're up to the daunting task: "We're gonna hold onto our buttocks real tight". Teasdale chimes in, explaining their tactic of "eating lots of vegetables" to stay fresh on tour in the US. Between the gastrointestinal clenching and excessive consumption of vegetables, life on the tour bus could be a gassy affair. And that's without adding the pair's favourite savoury snack, vegan sausage rolls, into the mix; they're sure to find plenty of pastry in America, despite the absence of a Greggs bakery.

Some claim that the pair's truly stratospheric success could not have been achieved with merely a catchy hook and a helping of sheer good luck. This condescending attitude posits that an industry desperate for novelty has shaped their image and honed their sound to ensure they were crowned its indie darlings. Wet Leg have responded to these ideas in typically sardonic fashion.



The real story is far from the 'industry plant' narrative, and closer to the fact that Wet Leg were simply in the right place at the right time- and they had the tracks to back themselves up. Their happy-go-lucky attitude to forming a band, on a fairground whim, has stood them in good stead. It is true that signing with Domino Records lifted them from relative obscurity, and being attached to one of the most well-regarded independent record labels in the UK has no doubt helped keep them maintain that initial buzz. The release of singles 'Oh No', 'Too Late Now' and 'Wet Dream', over the past year proved that their instantly recognisable debut 'Chaise Longue' was no fluke. Indeed, much of the band's first album was written before the success of their viral hit.

Others attribute part of their rapid success to the recent resurrection of indie sleaze, with its nods to garish fashion and grungy guitars. The Wet Leg aesthetic lends itself also to cottage-core; there are certainly hints of Euro-folk and Amish subcultures in the album's artwork, that Hester designs herself, with headscarves and prairies aplenty. In their music, Wet Leg have achieved a form of audible hedonism- with lush guitars and potent hooks- that suits, or provides escapism into, headier times than those we're currently going through. A new sound for the new (and imagined) roaring twenties. Their debut album has a timely (and millennial) preoccupation with the foreboding sense of ageing, but tackles it with a flippant swagger, a pleasant absurdism and a disregard for the opinions of others. It's effortlessly witty, sexy and raucous.



Hester explains that "what's out now is on the light- hearted side of the Wet Leg spectrum", pointing to the upbeat and unbridled singles released last year. But, she teases, on their debut "there is some darkness to be had". To be gleefully coy about practically everything, and to cloak any seriousness under has become a core part of the Wet Leg brand. But this restraint, a bashful media attitude, stands in opposition to their catalogue of shatteringly honest song writing. Take for example, album opener 'Being In Love'. Its ostensibly downbeat lyrics, "I feel so uninspired, I feel like giving up/ I feel like someone has punched me in the gut", don't strike with the daft happy-go-lucky energy that we might have expected from the opening track. Then comes the killer refrain, "I kinda like it because it feels like being in love". Punctuated by roaring jangly guitar riffs and electronic effects, it's an evocative start to the album.

Darkness does come in the form of 'I Don't Wanna Go Out' whose lyrics run with the theme of the pleasure and pain in a quarter-life crisis ("It used to be so fun, now everything just feels done"). And 'Piece of Shit' which muses on self- esteem, or lack thereof, and shame ("alright, I'm not enough"... "alright I'm such a slut"). As well as touching again on being unlucky in love ("well if you were better to me, then maybe I'd consider fucking you goodbye"... "you're not in love, but it's close enough").

The easy- going absurdism of most of the first half of WET LEG is replaced by a distinctively bittersweet tone in the second. Teasdale speaks to the album's shifting tone. "We were aiming for good times all the time"- the catchphrase that's become the de-facto motto of Wet Leg. The claustrophobia of growing up in a small town, and the inevitable disorientation of leaving, is explored in 'Ur Mum'. In its surreal music video- directed by Lava La Rue- the pair torment arrogant local boy-in-a-band Scotty, as he becomes the prop for Rhian's pent-up anger directed at an ex- boyfriend. Teasdale's "longest and loudest scream", which she belts towards the end of the track, proves to be a violently therapeutic and reinvigorates the latter of WET LEG. Where indie sleaze is performative, Wet Leg's commitment to the pursuit of pleasure, and their acknowledgment of its pitfalls, is genuine.

'Too Late Now' is the

perfect exorcising finale to the album as it rails against the constant bombardment of information and opinion, through social media and dating apps, the common reference points of modern ire. Before reaching the jarring conclusion that "this world is pretty harrowing" and finally resorting to a bubble bath to "set me on a higher path". The track both aches with remorse and shrugs with indifference. It's either Too

**"We  
were  
aiming  
for good  
times all  
the time"**



Late Now to change what you've done or who you are, or Too Late Now to give a shit about it. Self-deprecating, self-effacing and self-accepting all at the same time, this is Wet Leg at their very best. Teasdale protests that being asked to pick her favourite track on the album is like "asking a mother to choose her favourite child". She does go reveal that her mum tells her that she is in fact the favourite child. Chambers lists 'Ur Mum' and 'Oh No' as her top picks. They both agree that their favourite track to play live is 'Angelica', which was due to be released the week of our interview; and it's easy to see why. The most rock-fuelled number on the album features a rowdy chorus that almost obscures that central refrain of "good times all the time", which is sure to get a raucous response from any crowd. That the motto nearly gets lost under the instrumentation chimes with the band's message that "good times all the time" are simply unattainable. The central theme of the album seems to be that good times do have to come under the weight of all of life's other baggage too. There's still room for frivolity, though, as 'Supermarket' recounts a tale of being booted out of a shop for being too high.

When asked to sum up the album in three words, Teasdale and Chambers are as succinct as ever, answering in tandem: "This...And...That". Literally finishing each other's sentences speaks to the closeness of their relationship. Friends for over a decade before deciding to form a band, their professional relationship, if you can draw such a distinct line between that and their friendship, is as collaborative as possible. If you watch the band perform live, the creative chemistry is evident in the interplay between the two and the backing band. After a few listens, it's fair to say that whilst a characteristically cryptic descriptor, "this and that" does accurately capture the eclecticism of WET LEG's track list.

Either another attempt to dodge any serious prying into their state of mind at the time of the release, or their mechanism for dealing with the expectation that has been placed upon them, the pair launch into a well-rehearsed bit to tease an unexpected interviewer. Rhian reveals, one can only imagine with a wry smile across her face, that "the funny thing is, there isn't actually an album... that's why you haven't been sent it." When the time comes for the non-existent album to be released, they'll be long gone. Having "fake passports made up right now", they'll have succeeded in changing their identities to Mary-Kate and Ashley- the first names of indie sleaze fashion icons the Olsen twins- formerly of 'The Shire' (a cottage-core twist), and disappear into anonymity.

It's becoming clear that to fully immerse oneself in the bona fide Wet Leg experience, one has to lean-in, dive head first- into their silliness. So, what follows is an exchange that occurred at the very end of our interview; a random selection of quick-fire questions:

Do you own a mini fridge? "No". Fair play.

What did you have for breakfast? "Erm... vegan pain au raisins". Very on brand, who knew that such a delicacy existed.

What's your favourite type of crisp? "Chilli Heatwave Doritos, Cheetos, and...Takis" Takis?! I ask. "They're blue...sometimes they're orange". "They've only just been made legal in the UK!", quips Rhiann.

Is your muffin buttered? "Is your muffin buttered?" comes the reply from Teasdale. A quintessentially Wet Leg way to conclude.

WET LEG amounts to a brand of punk-tinged indie rock that is pleasingly refreshing if not revolutionary. It could see Teasdale and Chambers lauded as the guitar heroes of a glittering new indie age. Not steeped in narcissistic introspection- as is some contemporary post-punk- and much more mature than your average indie fodder. The sophistication of the album's social critique goes a long way to proving that Rhiann and Hester are achieving something very subversive, and having heaps of fun doing it. In its candid vulnerability is a tenderness. In its angry moments is an elegant rage. In its extravagance, a euphoric pleasure. Wet Leg will be buttering muffins for some time to come.

Joe Hughes

"I feel so uninspired,  
I feel like giving  
up... I kinda like  
it because it feels  
like being in love"

**“We’re gonna hold onto  
our buttoholes real tight  
and eat lots of  
vegetables”**



# caroline caroline caroline

Even amongst the vanguard of excellent bands that make up the renaissance taking place in the British rock underground in the last few years, caroline stand out. The London based eight-piece have a familiar origin story, gradually building hype off of small gigs and an early single that bagged them a nomination for the Ones To Watch Award at the 2020 AIM awards. Their sound, on the other hand, is anything but standard. Aching baroque and stunningly delicate, their minimal approach to post-rock and lowkey indie folk is more indebted to the electro-minimalism of Phillip Glass, the 90's sonic experimentation of Gastr Del Sol and operatic midwestern emo of The Brave Little Abacus than the usual hodgepodge of 80's post punk and 90's indie common to their contemporaries. Members Casper, Jasper and Mike sat down with Willow White for a brief chat just before embarking on their first full UK tour.

The band began as a regular jam session between members Casper, Jasper and Mike. Early on they weren't even sure if what they were doing would develop into band material let alone see any formal release enabling them the freedom to find their stylistic hallmarks and thematic throughlines that would come to define their sound. They came into the studio to record their debut with 3-4 songs already written, and at least partially recorded, and were then afforded far more time and the ability to commit more effort and energy to the recording and mixing processes by the advent of the pandemic which undoubtedly contributed to the records immaculate sound as they had near unlimited time to spend in Zoom mixing sessions perfecting the records sonics before it's release. This, combined with the relatively loose expectations of a debut, empowered the band to follow more experimental creative impulses leading to a more unique end product- their self-titled debut caroline.

Where the expectations of a fanbase, a label and the broader music community do come into play though is in the material following up the debut, material that the band is already working on. This has made the band conscious of how they want to develop their sound moving forward. They're all deeply satisfied with how the debut has come out. They've a love for the material, so the band are choosing to actively avoid moving away from the sonic elements of the debut and instead focus on developing the same ideas, but honing them in the way they currently find most interesting: combining sonic worlds in ways rarely seen before. This must all take a back seat for now though as the band embarked on their first tour since the pandemic in late March. An experience they've been looking forward to with some exciting venues and the prospect of playing music and having fun together being especially inviting after a period of such unprecedented social isolation. With this in mind, it's clear that while the release of the album and subsequent tour are both landmark moments for the band, it's only the beginning for caroline.

Willow White

## interview







*"I think I shout it in a more maniacal way now. I wanted the roughness and loudness of it to be a personification of the will to break free"*

# album review

As soon as the opening chords of 'dark blue' unfurl from caroline's self-titled debut album, you are irretrievably and irrevocably mesmerised. The enigmatic eight piece from South London have managed to create a masterpiece of multi-instrumentalism and traditional folk, yet concentrated through the lens of their contemporary South London music scene, sitting alongside the likes of shame, Black Country, New Road and Sorry, yet carving out a peaceful little nook that is uniquely and undoubtedly their own. 'dark blue' was the first track to be released by the band, delivered without fanfare or even a Spotify bio to accompany it, instead gently welcoming you into the world of caroline with its lush textures and slowly revolving, hypnotic guitar, ready to be consumed in all its simplicity and complexity. Having met at university in Manchester, the founding members Casper Hughes (guitar, vocals), Jasper Llewellyn (vocals/drums/cello) and Mike O'Malley (guitar) trialled various iterations of their band before migrating to London, gathering new members and finally settling on this amalgamation of influences and instruments in the form of caroline. Featuring trumpet, cello, flute and two violins, the band is bordering on an orchestra in both membership and sound, combining their breadth of musical skill and influence to create a truly singular sound. Part folk, part post-rock guitar music, part Midwestern emo, caroline manage to skirt the fringes of a multitude of genres without quite slotting into any, simply producing soft, beautiful music. 'Good morning (red)' follows 'dark blue', blooming into existence as two swooning violins and the deep cello serenade the metaphorical break of the day and Hughes' soft vocals invite you in. The track swells and progresses in swirling eddies of sound, full of the naïve hope of the younger Hughes in early 2017, when it was originally written, filled with a certain optimism for the country pre-Brexit, pre-snap election and pre-covid and somewhat foolishly expecting a return to power for the then promising Labour party. It is a song of hope, of change and of frustration, preparing to see in a new dawn for the country at the time as much as for a new day. Yet, reflecting on the track now, the dual sentiments of a hope and frustration remain, though perhaps the delivery has become more desperate and plaintive, "I think I shout it in a more maniacal way now," says Hughes of the track and the way it has aged since its conception. "I wanted the roughness and loudness of it to be a personification of the will to break free, but also the grief I feel now that hope has receded." The track is a collage of recordings taken across three years in multiple settings, a long time

in the making and carefully built up with texture throughout this time, as new instruments and perspectives were added. The album fluctuates between long meandering, complex pieces to short emotive songs. 'Skydiving onto the library roof' is broad and expansive, waxing and waning for over 7 minutes, while 'desperately', simply featuring a solo cello and Llewellyn's vocals, is 74 seconds of plaintive and beguiling beauty. Almost over before it has even begun, the track is still able to convey such heartfelt emotion and depth, and this perhaps lies within its simplicity. It is possible to hear creaks of floorboards and the structure of the room the song was recorded in, something which is prominent throughout the album as a whole. "You can tell it's recorded in a living room with wooden floorboards," says Hughes, "It's not just the sound of the room itself, but also the way it feels to play music in a room". This DIY, home-recording aspect is integral to the sound and shape of the album, recorded via thrice weekly Zoom sessions, where each track was painstakingly and repeatedly played to exhaustion until every single detail was perfect. And yet, still it feels as though each performance of caroline will be different - with eight supremely talented musicians it is hard not to be consistently evolving, and the onstage translation of this record will doubtless be varied in every iteration. 'TWR' is perhaps the epitome of this constantly evolving technique, the repeated vocal melody continually sung in a round, anchoring the track as all other instruments encircle it. The slow unspooling of the track builds to a sudden burst of powerful, strumming guitar while the vocals soar over the top in unison. Again, the track ebbs and flows with a layered, richly textured tapestry of instrumentation but still feels as though it is slowly turning and revolving back to where it begins. caroline's music is immersive and expansive, the band gathering you up in their wake as they carry you through 10 tracks of softly disarming beauty. There is a certain confidence to their delicacy which makes caroline's music so utterly delicious, each track exquisitely and carefully crafted, yet it is clear that this album is just one of countless possible evolutions. caroline have managed to create an album of true beauty, something that is rarely seen with a debut from a relatively new and unknown band, yet I urge you to sit down, put on those headphones and just absorb caroline in all its gentle glory.

*"Aching baroque and stunningly delicate, a minimal approach to post-rock and lowkey indie folk"*

Freya Saulsbury-Martin

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT



MELODY BURGESS-ALLEN

# ALBUM REVIEW:

## FRED AGAIN..

### 'ACTUAL LIFE 2 (FEBRUARY 2 - OCTOBER 15 2021)'

In the first year of my degree, I studied a poem called *The Wasteland*, by a poet named TS Eliot. It's an important poem that every English student comes across sooner or later. Its fragmented structure was influenced by Eliot's declining mental health and marital difficulties. Eliot focused these struggles into writing a poem about disillusionment and purposelessness, that weaves together many different narrative voices from across various locations and times, painting a picture of the urban modern world.

There is of course a reason why I've begun this review with a slightly-pretentious-English-student-spiel. Hugely acclaimed South London producer, Fred Again.. recently released the follow-up to his stirring debut album, *Actual Life* (April 14 -December 17 2020). This one's called *Actual Life 2* (February 2 – October 15 2021), and despite the miniscule break that he's given himself between these two records (only six months), he's showing no sign of stopping. These two records are supposedly only the first two entries in a long running, dance-music, 'diary' that he's going to be working on in the future.

When I think about the Fred Again.. tunes that will follow *Actual Life 2*, I can confidently say that this man is composing a TS Eliot-like electronic poem on urban life in 2021, that will likely resonate with people for years to come. To push this TS Eliot analogy a little further, what's fascinating about *Actual Life 2*, is that, like *The Wasteland*, it depicts Fred's personal voice and personal struggles, by using other voices and perspectives by sampling. On this album and his last, Fred samples, splices, and chops audio from other songs, Instagram clips, nights out, face-time conversations, and answerphone messages. He surrounds them with emotive dance music, composed from rarely more than his laptop, smartphone, and a piano, albeit with a select few sequencers and synths.

This is a hugely honest and personal record for Fred. However, it is at its most powerful when it connects personally with the listener. You should shed all preconceptions when you first listen, forgetting about Fred's biographical info, and putting the overexaggerated English-student-comparisons of this review to the back of your mind. This is a record that can speak to your connections with the people around you; it's like a wild night out in a city with your friends, and tracks the highs and lows of those kind of experiences. The cloudy synthesizers and sleepy drum patterns of opener *Catrin (The City)*, evoke feeling locked inside your own head, not opening up to those around you, 'I fell out of love with you'. Later, one of the best tracks on the record; *Tate (How I Feel)*, conveys the relief of expressing your inner self to someone, with its positive driving drum beat, kaleidoscopic vocal samples and piano flourishes.

Further down the line, the track '*Billie (Loving Arms)*' conveys the thrill of human intimacy in a festival-ready track, before the record ends on a bittersweet note in '*Mollie (Hear Your Name)*' – a track about coming to terms with loss and memory 'I won't feel ashamed, when I hear your name.' The outro track, *October 15th 2021*, bookends the album with a vocal sample from Fred, 'I know there's been a lot of reasons to stop. I pray you haven't done that. Forgive yourself now.' Personally, I can't think of another dance music record that ends in such a poignant way while speaking to so many people.

This record is by no means perfect, certain tracks do fall a little by the wayside, and Fred's production could be made less over-the-top and sprawling for future installments in the *Actual Life* anthology. It's far from the most avant-garde, experimentally attention-grabbing dance record that's ever been created, and won't connect with everybody like it has connected to me. However, I don't think anyone can doubt the unrivalled creativity and heart that has gone into *Actual Life 2*. Fred Again.. has brought an emotional resonance and a breath of fresh air for modern dance music. Who knows which exciting directions this unstoppable producer will go next?

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT



BEN MASSEY



# BREAKING THE BOUNDARIES OF ROCK WITH ALT-J

## ROCK WITH ALT-J ROCK WITH ALT-J

When asked to describe a typical modern rock band, what are the first attributes that come to mind? Guitar solos, thundering vocals, heavy drum symbols amounting to copious hit singles and international fame. Now swap the guitar solos for Gus Unger-Hamilton's blissful vocal harmonies, the thundering vocals for Joe Newman's quiet and calming ones and exchange the heavy drums for Thom Sonny Green's restrained percussion of cowbells and tambourines. Phoebe Millard speaks to Alt-J; a band breaking the boundaries of rock.

It is coming up to the ten-year anniversary of the Mercury Prize winning debut album *An Awesome Wave* released in 2012. An album which defied traditional music structure at the time and was almost created by chance. What are the odds that you are going to

meet a group of talented musicians at university that can not only perform your music but form a creative coalition? Quite slim. But exactly this happened to frontman Joe Neman and the group formed at Leeds University. *An Awesome Wave* came to life in their bedrooms and having to keep noise to a minimum resulted in Newman's distinctively eerie but calming tone. Alt-J are known for exploring dark topics and for using offbeat cultural references - the album's title lifted from Bret Easton Ellis's novel *American Psycho*.

Fast forward to 2014, *This Is All Yours* followed, which reinforced Alt-J's entrancing sound through the emergence of an unusual but effective folk sound, electronic undertones, which complemented their straight-up rock roots. Another album jam-packed with cultural references with 'The Gospel Of John Hurt' being inspired by the famous scene in *Alien* featuring the gut-popping monster. This second album kickstarted their

*"After two weeks of touring you can do it with your eyes closed"*



American fame as 'Left Hand Free' was showcased in a Hollywood Marvel film. After a three-year break, they followed *This is All Yours* with their third studio album *Relaxer*. This 8-track record was filled with strings performed by the London Metropolitan Orchestra and showcased guest vocals from Ellie Rowsell of Wolf Alice on '3WW'.

Their fourth album, *The Dream*, was released in February, intriguingly offering a "creative rebirth" for the band. Alt-J took a hiatus in 2019 only performing a couple of weeks of festivals the whole year. Topped off by the pandemic stopping live music in its tracks, so much time away must have had a large impact on any band. What are their thoughts leading up to touring again? "I am nervous", Thom honestly explains. "Whenever we have a long break, I am always a bit nervous about it. As long as we can rehearse quite a lot, we'll be fine, and we play so much. After two weeks of touring, you can do it with your eyes closed."

After over two and a half years *The Dream's* first tour will take place in America followed by the UK tour in May. The band seem to have taken a penchant for performing overseas and especially in the US, does Thom find touring in America different to the UK? "Yes, sometimes", he ponders for a moment. "The US is so big you get different pockets of people and climates... Austin in Texas is a 24-hour party, and the show is like a party. I love Austin. In the UK the fans are a little more introspective and attentive. In the US they just show up and want to party and are not actually listening to what you're doing."

Lyrically, Newman's most influential reference point for *The Dream* was true crime podcasts. Thom speaks on behalf of Joe in suggesting that, "with Joe he takes on things which inspire him, whatever that happens to be. The main podcast was 'my favourite murder' which he quite liked and inspired many of the lyrics; but he might read a book or see something that will lead to a lyric, and I think we are all fans of podcasts." The sinister track 'Losing My Mind' explores these dark themes, written from the point of view of a serial killer. Another, 'Happier When You're Gone', follows an ominous tale of a woman killing her abusive partner, then burning the body.

"You might have a really expensive drum kit, but you end up using the box that it came in to record"

Thanks to the band's musical constants, specifically Newman's distinct voice, they are allowed to explore many genres whilst maintaining their classic 'Alt-J sound'. For example, *The Dream* experiments with orchestral samples in Philadelphia, electronic beats in Chicago and even Western blues. But what was Thom's take on the band's flexibility? "I think the key to that is we don't actively aim for a genre like western blues, I think when the tracks start to take shape and it nears its completion you know that that's the genre so we should maybe mix it in that way. We do things that we think sound good that we like the sound of, causing it to always end up sounding like us. I think maybe because Joe has such a distinctive voice he ties a lot of it together and so we can afford to experiment a bit. But I think it's just because it's always just the three of us."

The band are notorious for using instrumental tricks throughout their album that many the average listener would not pick up on first hearing. For example, the bass guitar in 'Taro' uses a role of sticky tape to achieve the high pitched riff. When asked if there are any instrumental tricks on the new album, Thom replied, "Yeah there always is, there's a lot of weird drum percussion stuff that we use. Anything really, anything that sounds good. It's funny, you might have a really expensive drum kit, but you end up using the box that it came in to record because it has such a nice sound to it. We like to use a lot of weird microphones set ups. In the studio at the moment, we put a microphone in the downstairs toilet. You play something and then it picks it up and then on top of that you have the natural reverb in the air-conditioning. So many little things that come up. When I listen to music I really love when I hear stuff and I don't know what it is. Some of my favourite electronic music is songs where I don't know how they have done it."

"We have a tendency to write quite blissful... blissful is a good word... blissful music"

Alt-J are not shy when it comes to cinematic quality with 'Breezblocks' from their first album, produced by Ellis Bahl, winning the 2012 UK Music Video Award for Best Alternative Video. The drama and cultural references entailed in Alt-J's lyrics also carry through to their much-loved music videos. When asked if Thom had a favourite music video for The Dream he mentioned how "Joe has worked on a video directing and has been the main source for the ideas for the videos." Hinting at the music video for 'Hard drive Gold', Joe's first directing role on an Alt-J music video also featuring choreography from his partner, Darcy Wallace. Following up to the album's visual imagery, is there a reason why this is your first time as a group appearing in a music video, U & ME? "Why not!?" Thom exclaimed. "I think we just liked the idea of it. The idea for the video was Gus's. In the past we have not been able to do it because we've been on tour, but we also felt like unless it was for a very good reason, we don't like doing that kind of stuff. None of us are particularly keen on being celebrities and so the agenda isn't for us to be in the video for that reason. It was fun and nice to actually be on set and be around the camera a bit."

The process of completing The Dream took from August 2020 to July 2021 during a time of much uncertainty. It is clear that the pandemic had a major influence on the band, like most, as outlined in the track 'Get Better'. The album also features multiple samples of the member's family and friends. Was this almost paying homage to the pandemic as most of the year each other's voices were the only thing we could share and receive? Thom pauses for a second, "That's a good perspective, part of it was because we couldn't get features, but we couldn't do that at the time. We asked family and friends instead. It was a nice way to include them as we spent most of our time with them or in the studio, so they were part of it and made it a more personal album."

This use of samples can also be heard in Alt-J's second album, where Miley Cyrus features on the track 'Hunger of The Pine'. Ellie Rowsell also makes an appearance on '3WW' on Relaxer. Is there a reason, apart from the pandemic, why there are no features on The Dream? "It's not an instinctual thing for us to think about other people when we're writing in terms of other artists," Thom Green tells us. "I think we are quite private, and it doesn't seem that necessary for us. With Ellie we knew that we wanted a female vocal for the section and we know Ellie and thought it would be nice and it worked out well but a lot of the time we don't have that need and we are also a little bit nervous about it, we are not the kind of band that are super social and make friends with other bands. In terms of collaboration, I think we are a little bit shy, and we prefer to just do it ourselves. We are really aware of what people think about us and people question features a lot but also, I'm on the side of the defensive that is who cares what people think? Doing the Miley Cyrus stuff, she has an insanely good voice and it really worked. We get asked quite a bit to feature on the albums and want to get in the studio. We tend to just write the album and then it's done. Then tour and take time off and we're not always just in the studio. Writing is very enjoyable, but it is a lot of work."

Alt-J have rightfully claimed their sound on their most personal album to date. Exploring their artistic endeavours whilst remaining unphased by their success. The Dream is proof that the band always have more to give.

Phoebe Millard



# NILÜFER Y NILÜFER

Over the past six years, 26-year-old Londoner Nilüfer Yanya has carved out a unique space in the indie-sphere. Her early EPs showcased her unique guitar-playing-style, that stylistically sits in-between Grant-Green and The Cure, and her song-writing skill is also a force to be reckoned with, as demonstrated in her thematically-rich 2019 album, the sprawling and dystopian *Miss Universe*.

All of these thoughts crossed my mind, as I sat in front of Zoom and waited to speak to Nilüfer. Her uniqueness made her an intimidating prospect to interview. However, when Nilüfer appeared on screen, her personability and calmness shone through, especially when I asked how she felt about the impending release of her second album, *PAINLESS*: "I'm just trying to enjoy it...with your second album, it feels like you're doing something again, and you're a bit more conscious about what's going on. I definitely feel a bit more grateful for being able to do it, especially in these times!"

Thus far in her career, despite her meteoric rise to indie stardom, Nilüfer's collaborators have been fairly alternative, rather than drawn from the mainstream. I ask her about the production team that worked on *PAINLESS*, and she mentions Wilma Archer, her touring band member Jazzi B, and Andrew Sarlo of Big Thief production credits, the former two being long-time collaborators, the latter being more of "an experiment that worked out." She elaborated further, "I knew I wanted to work with Will more, as we didn't quite reach our peak of what's possible. On this album we did lots of co-writing, which was really cool. I thought I was going to do more writing about myself, which is always going to be my aim, but I thought "Why can't you do both?" I wasn't feeling very inspired at the beginning of 2020, so that all felt necessary." I mentioned how I'd recently watched her 2021 KEXP performance with Jazzi B, on YouTube. I remarked upon the synergy between the two of them, and asked her what qualities she looks for when working with others. She reflected that "you've just got to feel like you get each other, and that you're connecting with each other. The people that I work with are the people that I'm amazed by; they're inspiring to even hang out with. It's nice to have that balance, when you can bounce ideas off of each other, as I can be quite shy and reserved."

Digging deeper into the process behind *PAINLESS*, I mentioned that, in other interviews, she'd expressed dissatisfaction with how her first album was constructed over the haphazard process of touring. Had she had time to sit down and focus, when recording *PAINLESS*? She told me that she had, as she hadn't been touring during 2020, but "there's always going to be something. It's hard to get the right process and environment." Moreover, she has continued to be inspired by musical and literary sources, name dropping Zadie Smith and Kate Tempest: "Some stuff sits with you at the back of your mind. The stories are always there. When it comes to writing lyrics, the language of them definitely inspires you." We then turned our attention to *PAINLESS*' unique artwork, which Nilüfer attributes to collaborative process of painting and photography between her and her two sisters: "I started building this made-up city with all the song names in there", an artistic choice that's no doubt evident in songs like the Radiohead-tinged 'stabilise', a track focused on urban claustrophobia.

She reflected upon the dynamic of working with her sisters, noting that "there's friction, as there is anywhere, but most of the time it's definitely working out. I feel like because we grew up together, being creative, it's easy to share ideas. Instead of it just being me, it's us, creating our own identities together, which is really cool. When you're working with your family, you're being yourself, but then again, not always." Nilüfer and her sisters grew up in a creatively driven household, their parents being visual artists. When I ask if that's ever given her a sense of creative pressure in her life, she responds





# YA ANYA RYANYA

PAINLESS

FER YANYA

**“IF YOU  
TO BE YOUR  
THEN IT**



**WANT MUSIC  
WHOLE LIFE  
CAN BE”**

“A lot of the pressure comes from my own goals. You forget when you're in the creative industries, people don't judge you in the same way, they don't see you like you're getting worse. Art and music is a journey and a process, as you're always working on something. There doesn't have to be pressure; and that's something I'm still getting my head around. Chill out! Nobody cares!”

Her relaxed musical ethos becomes even more evident when we discuss her creative process. She reflects that when she was young “It helped that my music teachers were working musicians. [Becoming a musician] did seem unreachable sometimes, but I saw it as a process of different stages. It depends upon how much time you want to commit and devote it. If you want music to be your whole life, then it can be.” I ask her to elaborate upon her guitar-playing-style, and she attributes her inspiration to the music of The Pixies, “it's all hook rather than solo based, and could be on any instrument, not just the guitar. Sometimes simplifying is when it gets really cool, and learning to play one thing with confidence. I've always struggled with rhythm so I strip it down and make it playable. I guess now the performance aspect feeds into it: how will this song look onstage? I try not to make it too complicated, but fun sounding for me.” The artist Dave Okumu, of The Invisible, taught Nilüfer to play the guitar when she was much younger, and she went on to collaborate with him on her earlier work. I asked her whether that was a strange experience. “The dynamic between us didn't change, we were both moving forward, and were just a bit older. It's nice when you have those moments, where it feels like you've come full circle, but you're still aware that it's not full circle, as I still feel like I'm the student. It's nice to have that community of people.”

Nilüfer was not only on the verge of releasing her second album, but also gearing up for a mammoth 2022 tour across Europe, the US, and Canada, which she expressed excitement about, “I'm just trying to see going to a gig as a fun and nice thing to do. I'm letting go of the idea that it has to be perfect, or worrying that anyone's going to review it. If people come and buy tickets, then it's wicked, it's just great to be able to do these things.” Her excitement about getting the new songs out there was palpable, she mentioned her favourite tracks on the record as 'L/R', 'Chase Me', and 'Trouble'. As we drew the interview to a close, I broached the subject of where her current inspiration was coming from, in asking which song Nilüfer wishes that she'd written, and she mentioned Don't Wanna Fight by Alabama Shakes. Does this mean her music will be getting even more bluesy? Personally, I wouldn't object to that. As we bid goodbye to each other, I reflected how Nilüfer had provided an interesting perspective on music and artistry. Her musical-confidence and artistic uniqueness stemmed from her trying not to compare herself to others, and seeing herself, and everyone around her, as engaged in a process of growth. This is no doubt evident on PAINLESS: Nilüfer's most concise, sincere, and engaging record yet. Go hear it for yourself, or see it played live in the array of Nilüfer Yanya shows that we'll be treated to this year.

Caradoc Gayer

**“ S O M E  
WITH YOU AT  
YOUR MIND.  
ARE ALWAYS**



**STUFF SITS  
THE BACK OF  
THE STORIES  
T H E R E ”**

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT



ELLA HOOD



# DOT TO DOT

If you've ever set foot in Notts, you'll have heard of the high energy Dot To Dot festival. With another date set in Bristol over the same weekend, we're once again being treated en masse to tonnes of up-and-coming artists that'll transform the city into one great musical celebration. Previous favourites to grace our Notts venues include The Growlers, Pale Waves and Crystal Fighters – it's safe to say this is the place to see fresh acts before they begin to sell out bigger venues and you can't get tickets!

This year's notable artists stretch from grime artist Ghetts to post-punk icons Squid, with singers Baby Queen and Alfie Templeman filling in the gaps in between. A personal recommendation to watch out for is dreamy, easy-listening trio Honeyglaze; they're relatively new to the scene but I reckon we'll be seeing a lot more of them.  
Local artists – TBA!

# FESTIVAL



# GREEN MAN

Founded in 2003, this year welcomes the 20th anniversary of iconic festival Green Man to the scenic South Wales location of Brecon Beacons. Green Man is well known for its sustainable approach to festivals and has been commended on its grass-roots style, even winning the 'Grass Roots Festival Award' in 2012. From literature to comedy to art, there's something for everyone at this child-friendly festival. With previous artists including Robert Plant, Jarvis Cocker and PJ Harvey, Green Man haven't disappointed this year with their line-up.

Between electronic project band Kraftwerk and indie-rock/soul artist Michael Kiwanuka, the headliners for 2022 year provide a little bit of something for everyone. Mic faves Black Country, New Road are being welcomed along with Dutch, indie quartet Pip Blom to treat your eardrums to some up-and-coming classics.



First organised for about 120 people in a disused quarry site, local festival Y Not? is back in style. Following a rough few years with bad weather, covid and (frankly) poor management, Y Not? have taken on feedback to give us a line-up that'll please everyone that loves indie, rock and independent music. Though considered a 'small' festival, what it lacks in size, it certainly makes up for in fantastic artists over the entire weekend

Previous artists include Catfish & The Bottlemen, The Libertines and The Happy Mondays

Not only are we to see the likes of Pale Waves, Jade Bird and Black Honey, Y Not?, being local, take pride in showcasing East Midlands talent such as The Chase, Cucumamas, and Babe Punch. Higher up in the bill are Nottingham classics Sleaford Mods and Do Nothing so it's safe to say with all these crowd pleasers, there's always going to be someone you want to see.

## Y NOT?

# FOR ECAST

Often regarded as a laid-back festival, Latitude is home to a weekend full of not only musical entertainment but also comedy, dance, poetry and theatre, just in case throwing yourself into a sweaty crowd isn't your thing. With a clearly sign-posted sustainable approach, Latitude offers a weekend of 'good vibes' for everyone who goes, no matter their tastes.

Previous artists include The Cribs, Haim and Wolf Alice (way back in 2013!)

The highlights this year stretch from British rapper Little Simz to singer songwriter Phoebe Bridgers who are both owning their respective genres at the moment. We also have the pleasure of seeing the likes of indie faves Fontaines D.C. and new-to-the-scene kick-ass girl group Los Bitchos.

## LATITUDE



# Wide awake

As an independent music festival, Wide Awake is a two-day event bringing us "notes from the underground, embracing leftfield Indie, Post Punk, Electronica, Techno, Jazz and more". With up-and-coming artists strewn in between our favourite bands, Wide Awake is the festival to expand your musical horizons whilst also being environmentally friendly.

On the Friday we have the likes of Sofia Kourtesis, Working Men's Club, Alewya with Bicep headlining and the Saturday gives us classic rock band Primal Scream for those who couldn't find anything else to tickle their fancy. Woman fronted band Sorry are also making an appearance along with Mic faves Yard Act, a must-see for those who fancy a bit of (indie) rock on their weekend off in Brockwell Park.



# VictORious

Though never the most diverse of line-ups, Victorious festival always boasts its ability to pull in some big names that even your parents will know and love. Held on the beautiful seashore of Portsmouth, this old-timey festival has seen the likes of The Kooks, Madness, The Specials and the Kaiser Chiefs in the past few years.

This year we'll see the iconic Britpop band Suede grace the shores along with Bastille and The Wombats. Rock band The Libertines will appear as 'afternoon special guests' on the Sunday, with Sugababes and Primal Scream performing as special guests the other two days.



A 10 day event in central London, All Points East offers six days of alternative music along with four free days of community activities such as an outdoor cinema, creative workshops and live entertainment named as "In the Neighbourhood".

The first weekend offers us the chance to see icons Gorillaz, one of those bands every indie rock fan needs to see at least once in their life, Pusha T, an American rapper signed to Kanye West's record label 'GOOD Music' and Gabriels, a smooth soul trio whose music sounds like it's straight out of the 60s.

The second weekend offers us the chance to see Aussies, King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard and Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds cross multiple oceans to see us as well as giving us the opportunity to see Nottingham's own post-punk duo Sleaford Mods take the stage.

# all POINTS east



# kite Festival

Billed as a 'new festival of music and ideas', Kite Festival is set to be one of the most innovative and exciting live events of the last few decades. Kite is spearheaded by media organisation Tortoise, self-described as "a different kind of newsroom", who aim to present the festival as an optimistic environment for three days of open debate. They'll host erudite conversations with some of the most relevant and well-regarded contemporary thinkers- including Richard Dawkins, David Olusoga and Professor Devi Sridhar who will give insight into her sage new book Preventable about the politics, ethics and economics of the pandemic. The Town Hall stage provides the venue for a series of fascinating talks in which the audience will be encouraged to join an inclusive exchange of views.

This impressive undertaking seeks to bring back to the fore the notion that a festival should not just be a space for live music but also creative thought, the discussion of ideas and artistic ideals, and social progress. Of course, great music will abound too, as subversive and influential cultural icon Grace Jones tops a diverse line-up. A handpicked roster of artists traverses genres as Mavis Staples, Self Esteem, The Orielles, Tom Misch, TLC, Katy J Pearson and Nubiyan Twist all perform across the weekend. Unmissable new music comes from post-rock innovators Black Country, New Road on the Heavenly stage, fuzzy electro-pop from Confidence Man, and indie dance veterans Saint Etienne make a return to the festival field. Ticket holders can expect front row seats to a heady mix of talent.

This is not to mention inspirational lyricism from English folk poet Shirley Collins, opinion from Jarvis Cocker, and comedy from Christopher Bliss, Reginald D. Hunter and David O' Doherty. Cultural highlights include Ai Weiwei in conversation with Russell Tovey on the connective potential of art, and drag sensation Bimini chatting with Queer Bible author Jack Guinness. And who would want to miss a Crypto masterclass in the gently rolling Oxfordshire countryside?! Kite's unique line-up and alternative focus will no doubt satiate revellers' desire for both music and knowledge.



# Walt Disco

Charlie Lock, James Potter and Finlay McCarthy of the theatrical and exuberant six-piece that is Glasgow's Walt Disco join Nieve O'Donnell to discuss upcoming album *Unlearning*, the Glasgow music scene and their upcoming tour.



Walt Disco's upcoming UK tour is the most extensive yet. Finlay deliberates, "I mean this is the longest we've ever been on the road yet, so I'm excited to live in a state of total limbo for two months and have the best time ever." As well as being their longest tour thus far, shows will tease new music, considering the release of their upcoming album, *Unlearning*, on 12th April. Coming across as incredibly excited, James states that they "can't believe it's three weeks away - it's absolutely crazy" whilst Charlie adds that the band has "been sat on it for such a while that it'll be crazy to see it out there."

This tour will be undeniably exciting. If not for how long it's been since Walt Disco have been on the road. *Unlearning* as an album was constructed under the circumstances of a pandemic which was of course somewhat of an obstacle to their song writing process. Talking about this process, Finlay said that they've questioned "how we can present those to a crowd - how can we live them up and how can we supercharge them?". Charlie added his own perspective that there are "a lot more drums so it's been quite fun to turn them into heavier songs." Because of the pandemic, songs from the new album will be played live for the first time and have different origin stories to usual circumstances. For Finlay, "there are ones that we've never played before that we've been doing in practice recently and they sound great. We've never done 'If I Had A Perfect Life' before live and that's really fun to play" and for Charlie, "I love that one as well. I think one of my favourites to play live is 'Those Kept Close' too." Some of *Unlearning's* tracks have had humble beginnings too, the chorus of 'How Cool Are You' originating from the group watching Elton John biopic, *Rocketman*, hungover alongside a wholesome chippy tea. Although songs like 'If I Had A Perfect Life' and 'Those Kept Close' harbour themes of missing loved ones as well as fixations on the past, the album is nonetheless anthemic, glittery and escapist; transforming them to the stage will be a delight to see.

After hearing that fans in Los Angeles wanted a part of the band, Walt Disco have set up Unexpected Letters, allowing the band and fans to

have increased access to one another. James enthused about the project, describing its origins: "It's when we started speaking to our PR in America. We have fans of us all the way over in LA and we wanted a way to interact with fans all over the world, especially at a time when a lot of people feel quite closed off in the world over the past year. We wanted to bring a smile to people's faces."

Expanding on the tour which will see them put smiles on more people's faces than they've reached before and will take them much further from where they began: Glasgow, Scotland. The band are indeed fond of the Glasgow music scene with James elaborating that "no matter how big the city, all sorts of people will move there, find themselves and have lots of interaction with interesting people". Having a musically rich history, Finlay also stated that, in Glasgow, "a lot of our favourite bands did the same thing so there's ghosts of old themes and what not". Away from the Glasgow music scene, the band have visited Nottingham a number of times and seem to be big fans of the venue, The Bodega. Finlay responds quickly that "we love it", of which the sentiment is resounded by James: "we love it, it's so good". They even have to consider together whether or not the upcoming tour date will be their fourth time taking to The Bodega stage.

In relation to *Unlearning*, Finlay elaborates that "we did quite a lot of actual music listening while we were writing the album because we had so much time on our hands from the pandemic. There are songs like 'Those Kept Close' which came about after me and James stayed up late one night and we were listening to Young Fathers. After we stopped that, we went for some Brian Eno ambient stuff and a couple days later, we were like, what if we combined those vibes? And that's how that came about." Following a proud tradition of Scottish artists who have refused to stick to socio-normative boundaries, Walt Disco cite the late SOPHIE as having an "obviously big influence" as well as bands like The Blue Nile and The Associates. In fact, the monumental track 'How Cool Are You?' was co-written by Calum Rankine, son of The Associates' Alan Rankine. Considering how effortlessly 'Walt Disco-esque' the track is, the similarities in sound are ever present.



"At a time when a lot of people feel quite closed off in the world, we wanted to bring a smile to people's faces"



Whilst the album is equally introspective for each member of the six-piece, universal escapism and collective uncertainty is also a prominent theme. Charlie says directly that "a lot of the music we were listening to at that time and the situation we were in caused a lot of escapism which, I think, binds itself to the album quite well." These themes remain constant throughout the forty-five minutes of the album and they also ring true for the band's intention for those listening. James states that "I really like the idea of people listening to the album on their own even though I'd love it to be listened to at parties, clubs, whatever. It's a nice thought to imagine someone in their room experiencing its ebbs and flows." Equally, the band resonate with the idea that a room full of people who find an affinity

with Walt Disco's music could find further solace in sharing it with others who feel precisely the same way in the same, celebratory space.

Finlay says - wholeheartedly - that their image as well as their music is "a kind of platform for self-discovery and for increasing our confidence" with Charlie adding that they actually "egg each other on, it's ever-evolving and has never stopped." Unlearning is an invitation to actively participate in self-discovery.

Nieve O'Donnell

# THE MIC LIKES

When there's so much new music on offer- and when it's so immediately accessible in a musical culture that leans more and more towards singles- it is far too easy to miss those releases which deserve a longer listen. Our committee demonstrates an impeccable collective taste in music and shares their favourite albums from the last few months.

## 'OOCHYA!' - STEREOPHONICS



Stereophonics are the ultimate nostalgic band, and their 12th studio album *Oochya!* is a real homage to this. The boys' new album was released in celebration of 25 years since their debut, *Word Gets Around*, and was originally meant to be another compilation of their greatest hits (following 2008's *Decade In The Sun*). While I'm sure there's a solid argument to be made around how the album is a little predictable- the casual fan would not be berated for thinking that the songs on *Oochya!* were made in the band's early-00s heyday- I love how comfortable this album feels. It's a beautiful testimony to the foursome's career, combining new songs, 'new old' songs, and a pleasant range of musical styles. It's nothing wildly new, it's nothing hugely special, but it's exactly what you want it to be and, quite frankly, I really enjoyed it.

HATTIE KILNER - MANAGING DIRECTOR

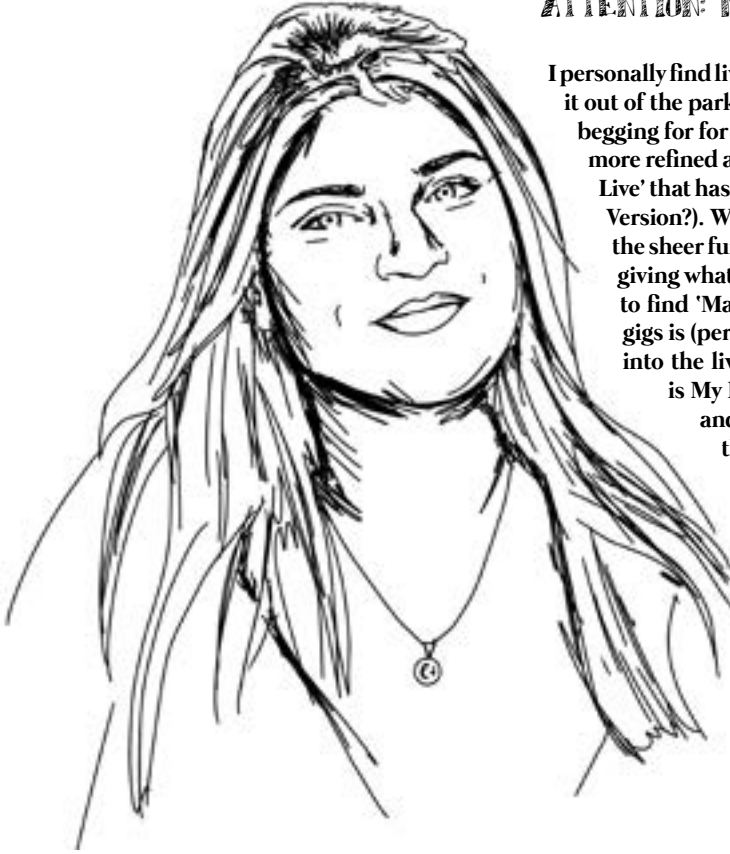
## 'AT THE HOTSPOT' - WARMDUSCHER

Clocking in at eleven thrashing tracks, *At The Hotspot* is a scuzzy, sexy, garage-rock, punk-funk masterpiece. It builds convincingly on Warmduscher's impressive catalogue to date, whilst amping up the funk grooves and bawdy lyrics. The group comprises three former members of Fat White Family- whose raucous rock influence pervades into this, their third album- and is fronted by the eccentric, tracksuit-clad Clams Baker Jr. Track 'Fatso' encapsulates the Warmduscher ethos with its slick synth-punk sound and catchy lyricism ("It's a good-girl, bad-boy, upside-down world). Iggy Pop makes a surprise appearance on 'Rules of the Game', growling mellifluously; anything with the Iggy Pop seal of approval is worth a listen. The band's moniker, translated from the German, means 'someone who takes warm showers'; you might need a cold one after soaking up foul and funny *At The Hotspot*.

JOE HUGHES - EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



## 'ATTENTION: MILEY LIVE' - MILEY CYRUS



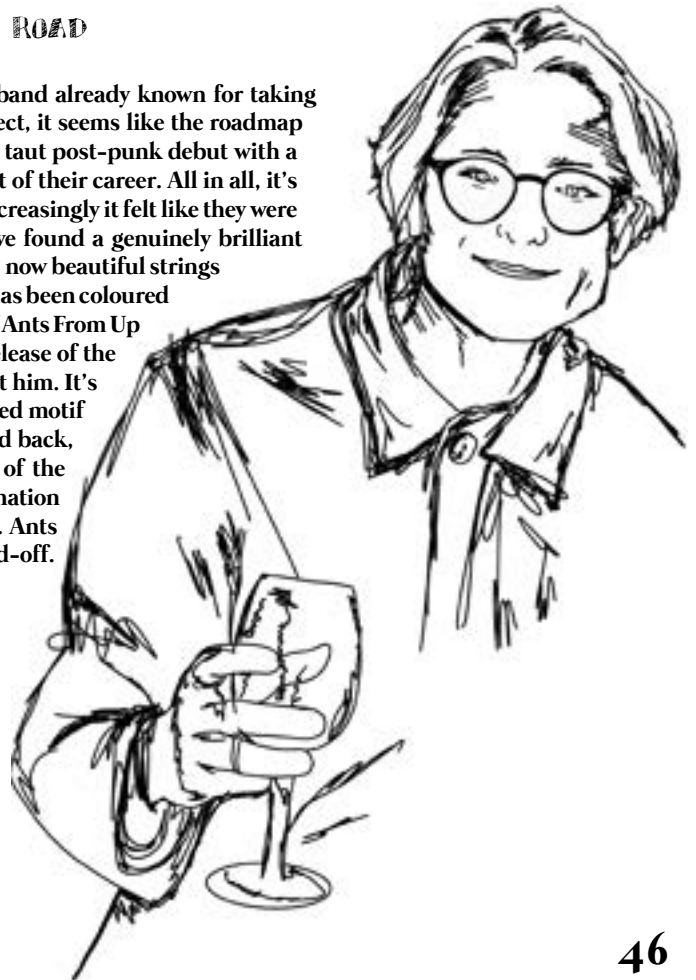
I personally find live albums to always be a risk, however it's safe to say Miley has knocked it out of the park once again with her first ever live album, something fans have been begging for for years. Her raw, raspy vocals are as strong as ever, only having become more refined as the years progressed, her growth evidenced no better by '7 Things - Live' that has me wishing for a studio rerecording of the early hit (7 Things - Miley's Version?). With the tracklist directly inspired by requests from fans, you can tell the sheer fun she had performing both her own music and numerous covers, truly giving what we have waited for all this time (although I was slightly disappointed to find 'Malibu' missing from the record). As someone whose favourite part of gigs is (perhaps controversially) the snippets of covers bands will often sprinkle into the live renditions of their own music, Miley's addition of Pixies' 'Where is My Mind' to her iconic 'We Can't Stop' almost had me up out of my seat and dancing in the library. Seconds later however, the sheer emotion throughout 'Wrecking Ball X Nothing Compares 2 U - Live' very nearly had me sobbing in front of everyone, a true whirlwind of an album. The tracklist would of course not be complete without one of Miley's most notable covers 'Jolene', that she has previously performed with not just her sister Noah, but also Dolly Parton herself, as well as Madonna's 'Like a Prayer'. This album really does pose just one question: is there a genre Miley can't do???

ABI KARA-FERNANDES - ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

## 'ANTS FROM UP THERE'- BLACK COUNTRY, NEW ROAD

"The next Arcade Fire". A throwaway comment in 2020, from a band already known for taking themselves both very seriously, and also not at all. But in retrospect, it seems like the roadmap for what came next – Black Country, New Road followed up their taut post-punk debut with a dive into the baroque pop that Arcade Fire flirted with at the start of their career. All in all, it's not the route that anyone would have expected them to take, but increasingly it felt like they were strangled by the expectations placed on them, and the band have found a genuinely brilliant solution to their quandary. Where before there were manic guitars, now beautiful strings – where before sprechgesang, now harmony. Of course, all of this has been coloured by the announcement the band made the week before the release of Ants From Up There – that lead singer Isaac Wood would be leaving after the release of the album, and that Black Country, New Road would continue without him. It's hard to overestimate the effect this has on the album – the repeated motif of "the clamp" that pops up throughout the record, holding Wood back, now seems glaringly obvious as a metaphor for public scrutiny of the group. Ultimately, the album feels like a swansong for this incarnation of one of the most exciting bands to grace the UK in a long while. Ants From Up There may be a eulogy to that band – but it's a fitting send-off.

LOUIS GRIFFIN - COMMUNICATIONS SECRETARY



## FORBIDDEN FEELINGZ' - NIA ARCHIVES

Released on her own label 'HJINXX', Nia Archive's second EP 'Forbidden Feelingz' shows off exactly why she took home the title of Best Producer at this year's NME Awards. Fuelling my frantic library sessions, as well as getting me ready for a night out or keeping me entertained on long train journeys, 'Forbidden Feelingz' is a versatile listen. Whilst the roots of the album are in jungle, it has a little bit of everything, pulling fragments from garage, drum and bass, r&b and even jazz. Despite this it doesn't feel muddled or overcrowded but instead everything flows and rolls over each other until you end up with a fast-moving, incredibly well-produced listening experience that tickles the furthest corners of your brain. It is difficult to know what you'll hear next, from the captivating breakbeats in '18 & Over' to the softer guitar lulls in 'Luv Like' - Nia is constantly switching it up. The only thing you can be sure of is that it will sound great.

IVO KELL - SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER



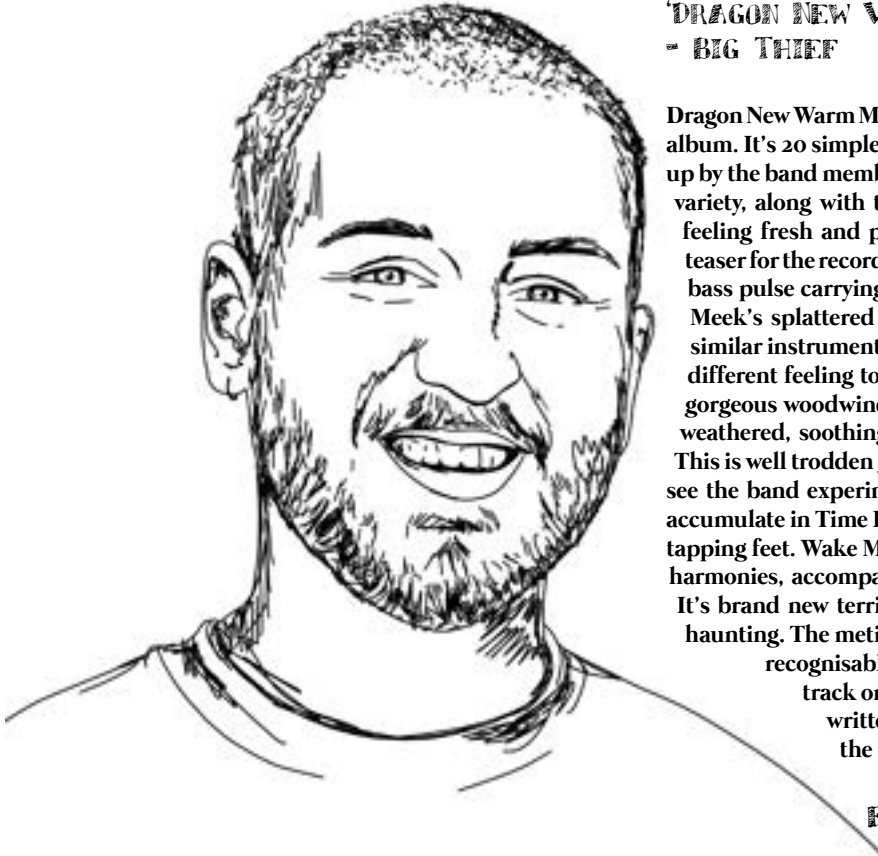
## 'NIGHT CALL' - YEARS AND YEARS

With Years & Years' debut *Communion* crowded with hits including 'King', 'Shine', 'Eyes Shut' and 'Desire', it's no secret that their sophomore effort *Palo Santo* didn't land quite as well commercially. However, the build up to *Night Call* seemed more promising, with singles 'Starstruck', 'Crave' and 'Sweet Talker', the latter a collaboration with Galantis, being some of the best Years & Years songs to date. Olly Alexander may no longer have the support of his former bandmates, but he has managed to steer the ship without any indication of self-doubt, in between successfully reigniting his acting career on Channel 4's award-winning TV drama *It's A Sin*. It has undeniably been a monumental year for Alexander, and on *Night Call*, he has combined a collection of catchy and irresistible dance anthems alongside earnest and heartfelt moments, to produce his best body of work to date. The concept of the album explores the culture of nightlife and one-night stands, written in retrospect during the pandemic and romanticised using metaphors of a mysterious call from an entity somewhere deep in the ocean, with Alexander himself portrayed as a mermaid on the album's cover art. This theme is conveyed most powerfully through some of the album's more delicate and personal momentum, from the ethereal synths that drive the track *Intimacy*, to the falsetto vocals of the chorus of *20 Minutes*, and the rippling instrumental of *'Make It Out Alive'*. *Night Call* feels like a moment of realisation, where Alexander has truly found his own voice for the first time.

GEMMA COCKRELL - FEATURES EDITOR



**'DRAGON NEW WARM MOUNTAIN I BELIEVE IN YOU'  
- BIG THIEF**



Dragon New Warm Mountain I Believe In You is a long name for a longer album. It's 20 simple, serene tracks, each rooted in folk and then built up by the band members to take on its own distinct character. It's this variety, along with the outstanding songwriting, that keeps Dragon feeling fresh and potent throughout its 80 minute runtime. Final teaser for the record, Simulation Swarm, has a warm and monotonous bass pulse carrying through it, pulling together with guitarist Buck Meek's splattered solos to produce irresistible urgency. Despite a similar instrumental palette, the track No Reason has a significantly different feeling to it. Spacey, clean electric guitar in your right ear, gorgeous woodwind slightly left, and lead singer Adrienne Lenker's weathered, soothing voice in the center make for a peaceful listen. This is well trodden ground for Big Thief, but several songs on Dragon see the band experimenting as well. As layers of tropical percussion accumulate in Time Escaping, it's hard to resist shuffling shoulders or tapping feet. Wake Me up to Drive is a fuzzy, lo-fi mix of downtrodden harmonies, accompanied by programmed drums and a hand organ. It's brand new territory for Big Thief - sweet, sad, and even a little haunting. The meticulous crafting of each of these songs is instantly recognisable, even to the untrained ear. Each element of each track on Dragon New Warm Mountain I Believe In You is written, played, recorded and mixed beautifully, and the result is magnificent.

**ELLIOT FOX - RELEASES EDITOR**

**'MONARCH' - SADEYES**

2022 brought us the long-awaited debut album, monarch, from alternative emo-rap artist Nathan Lewis, more famously known under the alias 'sadeyes'. Summed up, I would describe it as emotive lo-fi, as the Portland, Oregon-based artist explores themes of love, loneliness and mental health on 14 electronically produced tracks. Though many tracks have been previously released, the project feels like the first true cohesive release from the young musician, as it evokes cathartic emotions from start to finish.

While I'm usually not a fan of the excessive autotune found in hyper-pop, the lo-fi nature of sadeyes' music makes it enjoyable to listen to, and the type of music I would lend itself well to studying.

'chemicals' and 'poison' are examples of this, and I even find more simulated, glitch-like tracks such as 'PPL ALWAYS MAKE SHT FKN WORSE' bearable to listen to, even if it's not usually my go to. This is balanced with the sombre tracks which initially made me a fan of sadeyes. 'fast life', ft. guccihighwaters, is an example of Lewis' captivating lyricism based on the scary reality of life passing you by paired with a carefully crafted piano, hi-hat and 808 backing. Features from powfu, Lil Xtra and nothing,nowhere are also apt to give other talented artists in the seemingly underground genre more exposure. If you're looking for an album to represent the fog in your mind whilst still retaining an upbeat tone, monarch is for you, and is definitely one of my favourite releases of 2022 so far.

**AMRIT VERDI - LIVE EDITOR**



## 'DAWN FM' - THE WEEKND

The premise of this concept album posits that the project is a radio station and littered throughout are mock radio broadcast commentaries. As if commenting on life through an objective lens titular track Dawn FM initially states "This part I do alone / I'll take my lead / I'll take my lead, on this road", setting up the album as one of introspection. This album is vastly more introspective and reflective than previous dancefloor bangers by The Weeknd yet still manages to possess the 80s glitter that runs consistently through his work. At the end of Dawn FM, Abel sets us up to listen closely: "But what's the rush? / Just relax and enjoy another hour of commercial (Free yourself) music on 103.5 Dawn FM / Stay tuned.". Much of the album is covered with decadent synths and musical motifs whilst much of the instrumentation is discordant, matching up with the turmoil and eventual resolution of life. Second track Gasoline sees Abel heighten the influence of 80s industrial sounds in his music. How Do I Make You Love Me sounds like a dance track - think Eric Prydz but toned down to suit The Weeknd's r&b motifs. Sacrifice is followed by A Tale By Quincy which introspectively features Quincy Jones - a music producer who The Weeknd admires - as he reflects on a troubled upbringing and how his relationships with women have been subsequently impacted. Jim Carrey is The Weeknd's real life neighbour but instead of neighbourly kindness, Carrey litters the album with semi-satirical commentaries about the afterlife. As if about to enter the joyride to hell, Carrey cheerily says "here's some easy listening to some slow tracks" before finishing off in Phantom Regret by Jim.

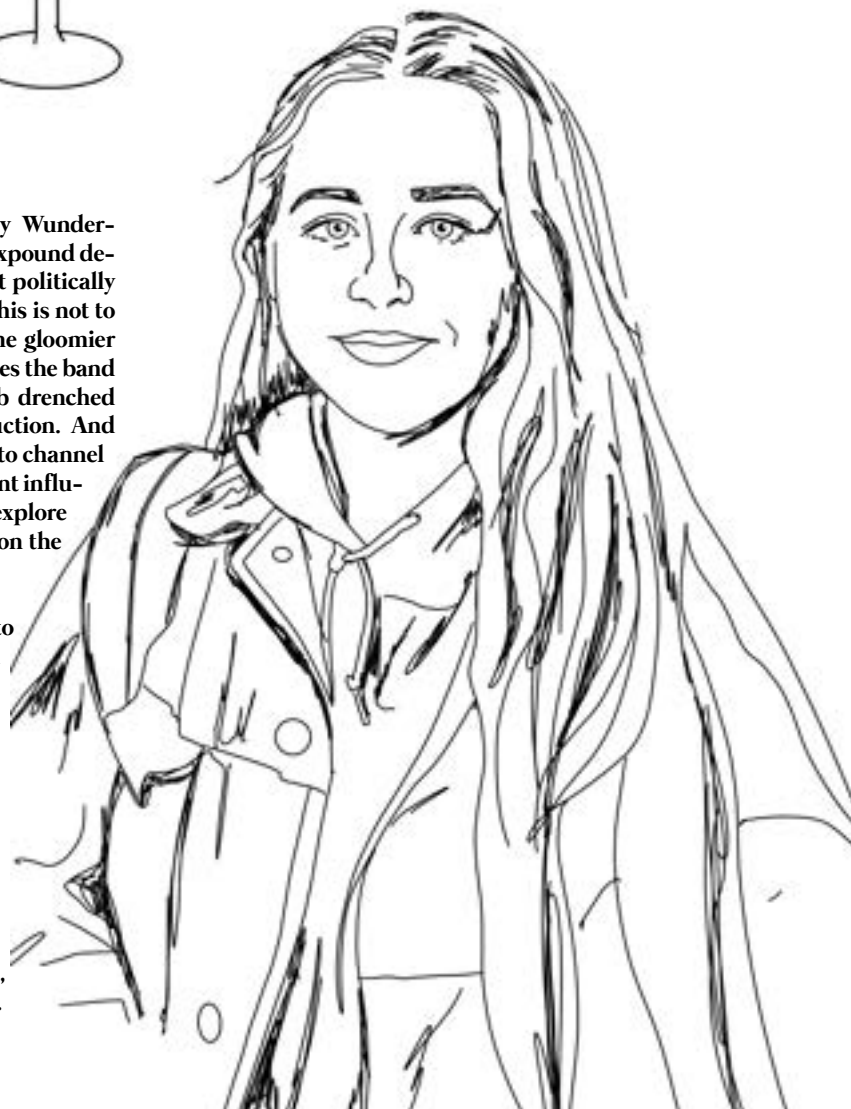
NEVE O'DONNELL - SOCIAL & WELFARE SECRETARY

## 'RETURN' - DEATHCRASH

Despite their emergence from the Brixton Windmill/Speedy Wunderground 'post-brexit-core' scene, where their contemporaries expound delightfully dry commentary, jostling for the title of most fun yet politically subversive, Deathcrash occupy the shadows of its periphery. This is not to say they are being outshined, but rather that they lean into the gloomier realms of slowcore, lofi and post-rock. Their first LP, Return, sees the band gently unravelling and carefully piecing back together reverb drenched guitar, with deeply introspective lyricism and simple production. And while Return does toy with experimentation, Deathcrash tend to channel their brand of brooding minimalism through the lens of adjacent influences. In maintaining a slow, measured pace throughout, they explore their own sprawling dreamscape, with each track building upon the next as it progresses.

For example, 'Matt's Song' is simple yet refined: stripped back to a gentle, acoustic guitar, offset by background chatter, muffled akin to a conversation taking place in another room, and not much else. 'Wrestle with Jimmy' follows, bearing little similarity to the Weezer track it shares its title with. Instead, it appeals to a post-rock palette in the way of Swans, building up through emo and skramz influences, to reach the dizzying heights of heavy vocals and thundering percussion which wouldn't be out of place alongside Alcest or Batshuka in the world of black metal. Then, with Metro 1, sludgy guitars collapse back in on themselves again. The ebb and flow between hushed vocals, trailing through wisps of hi-hats, blasting through the settled quiet with a churning wall of distortion, demands that you pay Return your full attention for its entirety.

LOUISE DUGAN - TREASURER



ARTIST SPOTLIGHT



PRIYA S MASURIA

**Not**

**Your**

**Fetish!**



# A look into the invalidation of queer female sexuality in the music industry

In since-deleted tweets from the end of last year, reggae favourite Lila Iké shared that she was 'in to women' after an individual had somehow found out and were trying to blackmail her with this information. In a stream of partially incoherent tweets, Lila told fans that she was in danger and that people had been trying to hurt her for just being who she was. It wasn't until mid-February that Lila appeared again online after being completely absent from social media and online spaces for three months. In an interview with Youtuber Yendi Phillipps, Lila shared that she has recently been diagnosed with Bipolar, explaining her previous outburst on social media. Explaining the series of posts where she shared her sexuality, Lila said she now realises she was having a 'manic episode' due to her mental health struggles. The topic of her sexuality, however, was not explicitly talked about.

It is not surprising that Lila does not feel comfortable sharing details about her sexuality, as many reggae artists have publicly shamed Lila for opening up about being queer. Jamaican DJ Lady Ann accused Lila Iké of tearing down reggae music by using it to 'cover up' her 'gay lifestyle'. Lady Ann claims she has worked too hard to promote the position of female artists in the reggae scene, to have it ruined by artists who should instead learn to 'come out properly' and not link their personal lives to reggae music. This thinly-veiled argument about progress in the industry is clearly fuelled by homophobia, despite Lady Ann's claims that she does not discriminate against the LGBTQ+ community.

Furthermore, Jamaican singer One4Can professed that reggae music and culture are being 'hijacked by the gay agenda', reminding everyone that reggae is not a 'vehicle for promoting homosexuality'. He even goes as far as to say that there is a 'scar' between reggae music and gay people. Another artist, Tosta Hype, claimed that Lila coming out signalled 'disgraceful times for the rasta movement'. Bearing all of this in mind, it is wholly unsurprising that Lila has remained silent on her sexuality, even when she has had the support of many other reggae heavyweights such as Protoje, Chronixx, and Jesse Beale.

Thinking about this situation and how those in the music industry openly invalidated and undermined Lila's identity, it became clear that this is not an isolated incident. Though Lila's degrading treatment is an extreme example, it is symptomatic of a broader issue in the music industry. Though very few artists are explicitly and openly homophobic like the ones mentioned above, many artists release songs that involve implicit homophobia. By perpetuating heavily stigmatised ideas about queer women, popular songs such as Girls Want Girls by Drake and Lil Baby invalidate queer female love whilst simultaneously fetishising it for the male gaze.

In September of last year, Drake dropped his highly anticipated album, *Certified Lover Boy*, but it hit the wrong note with his song *Girls Want Girls*. At first, the lyrics may seem innocuous, but it's not so innocent when you think about the negative stereotypes it refers to. His lyrics "say that you a lesbian, girl, me too" completely invalidate lesbian's sexuality, seeing it as not 'real' nor worthy of respect. When you listen to the whole song, you can see that he is just sexualising and fetishising women-loving-women (WLW) relationships. Not only this, the tone of the song implies that the woman is only in a WLW relationship because she has been let down or hurt by men in the past: "N\*\*\*\*s told you that they love you, but they fell through/ talkin' all the sh\*t that you done been through". Again, this clearly invalidates queer women's sexuality as it is seen as a decision they have made because of men or because they have been hurt, not because they actually love women.

Another example of popular music invalidating queer women's sexuality is Gunna's new song *pushin P* featuring Future and Young Thug. He can be heard rapping in the song, "She not a lesbian, for P she turn Peshian". According to Gunna, 'P' means *player*, so in the lyrics, he is saying that for him, or a 'player' the woman will stop being a lesbian. This perpetuates harmful stereotypes that queer women can be 'turned' or 'made straight' by a guy. Again, this invalidates queer women's sexuality as it presents it as something that isn't real and as a challenge for men to try and change.

The most explicit example of these stereotypical ideas is in The Weeknd's song 'Lost in the Fire' where he says, "You said you might be in to girls/ You said you're goin' through a phase", but he proclaims that he can change this and "I'll k you straight". This demonstrates the issue so plainly. Queer women's sexuality is seen as a 'phase' and something that will not last, with the woman always eventually ending up in some kind of heterosexual relationship. Whilst these few songs may seem harmless on their own, it is a deeply distressing theme that many artists clearly invalidate and undermine any sign of WLW love, always representing queer women as something to be sexualised or as the product of a 'phase' or 'man troubles'. Crucially, when these ideas and stereotypes are carried out into the 'real world' beyond music studios, real people like Lila Iké are put in danger of blackmail, harm, and who else knows what. There needs to be a change in the culture of music, and artists like Drake, Gunna, The Weeknd (and many more) need reminding that not everything women do is for the benefit of men.

Millie Hopcott

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT



MELODY  
BURGESS-ALLEN

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT






JENNY DAVIS



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