

Live previews: From indie to folk via country



Maths Class
Norwich Arts Centre, tonight
Following Blood Red Shoes, The Electric Soft Parade and The Macabees out of Brighton, Maths Class are an angular indie-disco five-piece who specialise in pacy nu-wave punk and breathlessly melodic rock. Intricate guitar riffing, driving bass lines and relentless drumming abound. Think a more in-your-face Foals and you're not too far away. This gig marks a break from the studio as the band are currently in the midst of recording their debut album.

Vocalist Tim Sketchley said: "We currently have around four, maybe five songs which we are all happy with, which we are intending to use for the album. We want to write around another 10 songs, which would give us a nice 14 or 15 tracks to choose from for the album, and also to use as b-sides. Hopefully we can really step on the gas over the next few months and get the album out towards the latter part of the year." They're joined on this Wombatwomab line-up by Norwich alt-rock favourites Kunk, who also recently spent time in the studio to record their single This City.

Further listening: www.myspace.com/mathssclass



Nick Harper
B2, tonight
Nick Harper has successfully emerged from beneath that long paternal shadow, gaining widespread recognition in his own right as a gifted singer-songwriter and a lauded guitar-playing talent. Son of the legendary Roy Harper, and collaborator with Squeeze's Glenn Tilbrook, his inventive style makes him one of the finest guitarists of his generation, while his distinctive, soulful voice and passionate songs place him somewhere between Rufus Wainwright and Jeff Buckley. Having played the guitar from the age of 10 and grown up surrounded by the likes of Keith Moon, Jimmy Page, Robert Plant and Dave Gilmour, he went on to record regularly with his father, but has since produced six solo albums, including 2007's critically acclaimed *Miracles For Beginners*. Live his personal introspection and biting political satire are usually mixed with charmingly caustic wit that often includes cheeky and surprising cover versions. Support comes from folk-country songstress Jess Morgan.

Further listening: www.harperspace.com



Hank Wangford & The Cowboys
Norwich Arts Centre, Saturday
If Daniel O'Donnell is the brightly scrubbed face of British country music then Hank Wangford is its guilty conscience, its dark and troubled grubby soul.

Hank has been picking at the miserable underbelly of country music for 28 years, inspiring others like Billy Bragg, The The, The Alabama Three and other alt country musicians. Here he joins forces with his Lost Cowboys to come back to Norwich with saddlebags full of old songs and new songs from the brand new and critically acclaimed *Whistling In The Dark*.

With Album of the Month from Country Music People already under his belt, Hank finally seems to have been accepted by the country music establishment, having always considered a renegade by them in the past. Guitar god Martin Belmont and pedal steel wizard BJ Cole are his fellow cowboys, while Hank, who was a doctor when he fell in love with country 20-years ago, will deliver his trademark lonesome vocals.

Further listening: www.hankwangford.co.uk



Duke Special
Waterfront, Thursday
Dreadlocked, eyeliner affecting troubadour from Belfast, who delivers impassioned songs, the music of Duke Special is filled with vaudeville-esque sensibility, sing-alongs and vagabond melodies. Mixing the appeal of a three-minute pop song with the incessant charm of an old-school music hall plus influences like The Divine Comedy and Elliott Smith, he returns to Norwich to promote his new album, *I Never Thought This Day Would Come*, which is released on Monday. His unique live shows mix an old gramophone with passionate vocals, piano playing and the occasional fiddle scrape. His work is nothing if not diverse. He wrote the theme tune for *Sesame Tree* – the Northern Ireland edition of *Sesame Street* – where he also got to sing with *The Muppets* in the final episode. He has recently hosted a night at the Belfast Film Festival where he performed as a puppet of himself. And not adverse to trying new things, he also recently played with the Dubai Philharmonic Orchestra.

Further listening: www.dukespecial.com

Return to form for 90s success story



One of the most inventive and successful British bands of the late 90s, Gomez's latest album has been hailed as a return to their roots – and to form. **ROB GARRATT** spoke to bassist Paul Blackburn and drummer Olly Peacock.

In 1998 Gomez were one of music's biggest success stories – going from ramshackle students making four-track demos to Mercury Music Prize winners in just months, shifting a million copies of their debut along the way. *Bring It On* was a revelation, its airy acoustic feel, bluesy rhythms and lo-fi home-made production helping to pave the way for everyone from maudlin folkies like Iron and Wine to stripped-back rockers such as The White Stripes. Its follow-up, *Liquid Skin*, kept up a portion of the commercial momentum while exploring new territories, introducing its audience a more brave, uncompromising sound.

But since then the band have slowly slipped towards the edge of the radar, with subsequent albums, including a live set and a collection of B-sides, slipping by respectfully unnoticed. Last year the band went back to the seeds of their success and played a tenth anniversary *Bring It On* tour, where they played the hit record in its entirety.

Bassist Paul Blackburn looks back on the tour without a hint of irony. "It was great, it was really good fun," he remembers. "There's still a large fan base for the record and it was interesting going to all the same places again; it felt just like being there 10 or 11 years earlier."

"When we made that record it was something a bit refreshing, very much 'anything goes'. It was the same time as the 'low-fi' movement, but it was never intentional – we used what equipment we had. "I think that's part of the appeal – at certain points music gets to be over-produced and synthetic and we went against that."

Gomez in 2009 are spread across two continents, with three of the five-piece scattered across as many cities in America.

Drummer Olly Peacock is based in Brooklyn, New York. "It wasn't really upping from our roots or us saying 'we have to live in the States'," he says. "Over the course of time, because we tour so much over in the States, it was going to be pretty much eventual that we would meet our good friends and wives and that's what led to all three of us out there. We got married and our wives are American. Within the last year-and-a-half two of us have got married and three of us got kids. Ben had twins, which came as somewhat of a surprise. Ian had a kid and Tom as well."

Tied to their respective cities with family commitments, their new album – notably named *A New Tide* – was painstakingly put together with an elaborate five-way email conversation.

"It was cool actually," says Blackburn. "We were all using Logic on the computer and it was a

necessity more than anything. But it was very liberating – in the studio you're rushed for time because it's very expensive and this way we could just mess around and throw ideas at it. You have time to really explore. People would send over anything from a whole song to a short idea and just see what everyone else thought.

"If you can all be together there's obviously something to be said for that, but it's sometimes nice to have a bit of space and absorb it. With five musicians in a room in can get very chaotic – like going in a guitar shop and everyone playing something different."

The new record has been hailed by critics as a return to form, picking up rave reviews after several years of lukewarm apathy. "The album's probably us looking to move into new ground again," says Peacock. "It's a bit more experimental than the last two albums. There's some familiarity back to the first albums, just us playing around with some things. There's some stuff on there which will maybe confuse some people on the first listen, but after a few times people will hopefully understand what we're trying to do. We're definitely trying to push things forward somewhat."

The main change that sets the second decade of Gomez from the first is the introduction of a producer. With their first three LPs entirely the work of the band, the last three have seen exterior forces coming in to help craft the work.

Blackburn says: "At first it was interesting. We've always had full control before and it was unusual to let go. But each time we've worked with a producer it's worked really well and both sides have understood each other. As a result the last two records have had a lot more focus. Previously we've made records that have been more a random mix of sounds. We would go into the studio and record and record songs and then in the end we would have 30 tracks and decide which ones go on the record."

"We were just being a bunch of little brats," echoes Peacock. "It got to a point where it was nice to just think about all the little buttons and controls. It just means you have a bit more freedom and time to do what you want to be doing and also having an outside point of view to say 'that's crap, that's great'. It just gives you another dimension for making music."

Blackburn seems more than content with the band's latest release, rating it among their best, and promising plenty more to come.

He adds: "It's got a bit of blues and folk feel, it's got more experimentation and we've used soundscapes more. That's something we've always tried to experiment with. The aim has constantly been to try to create something new you've not heard before. "I have highlights on different records, but I think the last two are best – I feel they're more accomplished. I think there's going to be more records. The immediate future is touring this album and there will be more solo albums I'm sure. But there's more Gomez albums to come too."

Gomez play the UEA on Wednesday.
A New Tide is out now.
Further listening: www.gomeztheband.com

Local shoegazers Sennen are one of the biggest bands to come out of Norwich for years, their wide-open soundscapes and epic instrumentation reminding people of the Norfolk Broads and picking up rave reviews. **ROB GARRATT** spoke to guitarist and vocalist Richard Kelleway.



What do you think of the local music scene here?

Norwich is pretty good, it has a pretty decent scene. Other cities of a similar size don't have as much, there's a lot going on and you've got places like the Queen Charlotte and the Marquee. For the size of city it doesn't do badly. If you want to get spotted by the industry you've got to go to London – but that's the same as any city. Norwich is the focal point for everything in Norfolk and beyond. I get down to the Arts Centre quite a bit. There's a lot of little bands doing really well. I listen to BBC Introducing Norfolk and there's lots of good bands around here.

Any other places you remember playing?

The Café D, on Bedford Street, we used to play up there and at student nights at the UEA, then we started getting support slots at the Arts Centre and since then we've played there lots and have a real relationship with the crowd there.

How did you guys get noticed?

It just takes time and you slowly build it up. When we did the first album it helped because it did quite well. It was quite a gradual thing, there's no one day when it suddenly happened. We built up support slots around the time of our album and then it suddenly started to get out. For the album last year we got very good press – the 8/10 NME review must have helped sell a few, although it didn't help as much we hoped! You do have to put a bit of time and effort –

it can be hard to get time off work to go on tour.

One review compared your music to the "widescreen sweep of big, bleak Norfolk skies." Are you influenced by the area?

If that's what people hear. There's no effort to sound like we're anything; it could be one of those things come through that you don't really notice. There's never been any kind of master plan – it's just what we sound like playing together. We're not even particularly great musicians, we came up with a sound that just suited us. I don't think we could play any other way.

Who influences that sounds?

A lot of bands we liked then and still like, like Spiritualised, Mogwai – when we started out we wrote much longer stuff, we're more focused now. My Bloody Valentine – I don't think we're that similar except we like to play loud.

Do you have any advice for bands trying to make it in the city?

If I was to give advice it would be like we'd made it – it's not like we're making any money or anything. It takes a lot of effort and time. Its rewarding – there's wonderful times I would change for anything but it's not all fun – getting gear out of the van in the middle of the night and going to work the next morning.

Sennen play the Arts Centre on Saturday.
Further listening at myspace.com/sennenwidows

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music notes with Kingsley Harris

The Great Shakes chose to start the Easter holiday with a little shindig at the Arts Centre.

First on the bill were Week 1 Let's Go, a new band in Norwich who formed late last year. It was pretty loose jangly indie. I thought they had some great ideas; Silver Fox is a touch of genius with the punch line 'Alan Sugar, he stole my heart'.

The band had a handful of tunes you could call good works in progress. They only let themselves down with the Weezer cover *Undone* – it wasn't pretty. They should have just played Silver Fox again!

Next up were Foreign Office, which looked a bit like The Asleep/Late Pistolas. It was very generic stuff and I could have copied and pasted quite a few bands straight into their bracket: Killers, Interpol, Editors and White Lies. While I like the new pop sound, probably because it derives the good things from the 80s, like strong leading bass lines and synth padding but wrapped in a much better coating: this band just didn't look comfortable.

Variation is good but you have to be able to sell it to the audience. Drifting from indie alt, pop and dance I couldn't tell that they were comfortable with



The Great Shakes



Dirty Tricks

but it's just gone underground and, like most classic styles, it's evolved and now has more variations than a light bulb joke. The guys ramped it up for the crowd and their enthusiasm probably brought on board a few converts.

Of the many R&B explosions we've had I felt the late 70s with bands like Dr Feelgood and Nine Below Zero was most prominent. One track had that Perkins, Rush Homework feel about it and I was just waiting for the harp to kick in, an instrument I think would really

make the band come to life. The Great Shakes wasted no time in getting the crowd warmed up. Their cross between Tamla and Beat means if you're not tapping your foot within the first two songs, it's probably fallen off.

The simplicity over technicality approach of their repertoire has meant they are one of Norwich's full on crowd pleasers. The band are down to play this year's Great Escape in Brighton and they have an EP out on LAP Records that's well worth the small sum they are charging.

sounds in the city

April 17
Maths Class (indie) — Arts Centre
Nick Harper (folk/rock) — B2
Emma Hall (pop/soul) — Brickmakers
The Lucky Last (rock) — Marquee
In Rapture (rock) — King Edward VII
Them Harvey Boys (bluegrass) — Cider Shed
Leopard Trio (rock'n'roll) — Blueberry
Killer Hurts (metal) — Queen Charlotte
The Mary Jones Scandal (rock/punk) — Heartsease
Mike & The Rhythm Stars (rock'n'roll) — Boundary
Tony Cann (singer) — Silver Road Cottage

April 18
Golden Years (50s/60s) — UEA
Hank Wangford & The Lost Cowboys (country) — Arts Centre
Kelly Jenns (acoustic — 1pm) — Arts Centre
Senses Fall (punk) — Waterfront
The Unremarkables (indie-pop) — B2
Arcadia Lake (indie) — Queen Charlotte
Ravkuns (metal/rock) — Brickmakers
Four Play (blues/rock) — King Edward VII
Coupe De Ville (rock/pop) — Reindeer
Worlds Apart (rock) — Boundary
In Rapture (rock) — Stanley

April 19
The Living End, below (punk) — Waterfront



The Floozies (folk) — Cider Shed
Outathablues (blues) — King Edward VII
Lee Vasey Big Band (J2pm) — Brickmakers

April 20
Deathstars (rock) — Waterfront

April 21
Propagandhi (punk) — Waterfront
Ten Ten Tackles (electro/indie) — B2
Luke Palmer (acoustic) — Brickmakers

April 22
Gomez (indie) — UEA
Alaska Pipeline + Hair Traffic Control (rock) — Queen Charlotte
Kapok (rock) — B2

April 23
Duke Special (indie/soul) — Waterfront
Egypt (blues/rock) — Blueberry
Lucky Last (indie/rock) — Brickmakers
Strength of Presence (metal) — King Edward VII
Vic Salter (country/blues) — Silver Road Cottage
St George's Day Special (punk) — Queen Charlotte

Your band in the spotlight

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