

## 2/Feb/2005 The Scene (Luton News/Dunstable Gazette)

### The Brian Heywood Column

#### *A local music venue?*

Even the BBC admits that Bedfordshire is the home to some of the best musicians in the country - and coincidentally, also Posh Spice. So it seems strange that the Luton/Dunstable conurbation doesn't have a grass roots music venue. By this I mean somewhere that promotes a broad range of music styles, where new bands can break into the music scene, but still attractive enough to attract more established acts. St Albans has the Horn, Bedford has Esquires, Watford has The Horns and even dowdy old Hitchin has Club 85 to provide a focus point for the local music scene. What does Luton and Dunstable have? Nada, Zilch, not a sausage.

I'm not trying to put down the more conventional venues like Luton's Library Theatre and the Hat Factory - though the latter has yet to decide what its role is in the local scene. These venues do their best but they have to work within the council's commercial brief - so it's not exactly Rock 'n' Roll is it. And I take my hat off to the sterling work that local pubs do keeping the local music scene alive, the George II in Luton and the Wheatsheaf in Dunstable spring to mind. But these venues don't put on a full programme of music, just one or perhaps two nights a week.

The Horn in Victoria Road (St Albans) is a good example of the kind of venue that Luton needs, music every night ranging from up-and-coming hopefuls, name bands, good covers bands and an acoustic chill out to wind up the program on Sunday night. In short the Horn is an example of a hard working music venue that is the focus of a healthy and viable music scene. Looking at last week's News/Gazette Club Guide, apart from the Tsunami benefit at the Exchange (a 'one off' gig,) there was just a bit of Jazz at the Hat Factory and a few scattered pub gigs. So if you wanted to see music on any night of the week, you'd have to go down to St Albans or up to Bedford. So there's an opportunity there for someone, but will anyone take up the challenge I wonder?

Aspiring young folk and acoustic musicians should check out the New Roots competition taking place on Sunday, April 17 in St Albans. This event is designed to encourage young performers of all styles of traditional or contemporary folk, roots or world music, whether traditional or original. You have to be under 25 and there are two categories; under 18 and 18-24. The prizes are opportunities to perform in front of the public at major folk festivals and venues throughout the region. This year the judges will be Sarah Allen, Brian Finnegan (Flook), Lynne Heraud and Andy Stafford and the finals will be followed by a concert with the competition finalists and the judges. The closing date for entries is the end of February and to enter you need to send a recording of up to 15 minutes of your music to Alison Macfarlane at 40 Warwick Road, St Albans, Herts AL1 4DL. For further details, email [Alison.Macfarlane@lineone.net](mailto:Alison.Macfarlane@lineone.net) or ring 01727 852111.

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## 9/Feb/2005 The Scene (Luton News/Dunstable Gazette)

### The Brian Heywood Column

One of Luton's hottest bands - **Bowfinger** - are playing over at The Phoenix in Hitchin on Saturday (February 12). The four piece outfit got together at the end of the last century, based around the talents of Ed and Iain who apparently first met at infant school and, after going through various local bands hooked up with Barry and Dave. The band's original songs have been described as truly individual band that have been compared to Elvis Costello, Squeeze and The Buzzcocks. Their initial success was due to the release of their debut single 'Probably Wrong' and a Christmas CD, recorded as a free gift for fans attending a festive gig, which both received airplay on XFM 104.9 and Pulse FM. The band's album has also been receiving good reviews and a lot of interest both in the UK and abroad. **Bow?nger** also have a reputation as a crowd puller, being known to sell out 200 capacity venues within 30 minutes. If you want to find out what they sound like then you can download their last single from their website at [www.bow?nger.net](http://www.bow?nger.net) or you can buy their album from [www.latentlemon.co.uk](http://www.latentlemon.co.uk). The support band on Saturday will be the **Fuzzy Lumpkins**.

For more acoustic fare you should get down to the Luton Library Theatre tomorrow night (Thursday) for a 'stomping acoustic evening' with the Sons of the Soil. The duo consists of Richard John and John Rickards whose material encompasses a diverse brew of musical styles from the Land of the free including Blues and Texas Swing, Bluegrass, Country, Hillbilly and Ragtime. Based firmly in Luton the pair were stalwarts of the late lamented folk club at the Hat Factory with their robust renditions of earthy American roots. The sons will be supported by two singer songwriters; Neil Munro and Steve Jones. Tickets are £5, for more information contact the Box Office on 01582 547474.

BBC radio may not put new music on the airwaves but you can get a dose of local independent vibes on the internet from their Unsigned Web Radio (UWR) website. You can be access what they describe as "hottest unsigned bands and musicians in eastern England" via a link from the Three Counties Radio website at [www.bbc.co.uk/threecounties/music](http://www.bbc.co.uk/threecounties/music). There are also instructions on how bands can get their material into the UWR playlist or their details onto the on-line local band directory. It might be a small step towards greater access to the broadcast media but if enough people log-on to the system then it will give the 'powers that be' an idea for the demand for new local music, which can't be a bad thing.

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## 16/Feb/2005 The Scene (Luton News/Dunstable Gazette)

### The Brian Heywood Column

#### Hitchin Folk Club wins top Billing

I mention Hitchin Folk Club a fair bit in this column since they usually have top acts and they are just down the road. In fact, as the club started in Luton, and with the Hat Factory dropping their folk programme, you could say that the Hitchin Club is the nearest thing that Luton has for a local folk venue, even if it's in the next county! Anyway, you don't have to believe me when I say it's one of the best acoustic music clubs in the country. On Monday it was voted the best club in the country at the 2005 BBC Folk Awards. Keiron Jones who runs the club along with Maureen says that "The award is a fine tribute to the club, its members and the wonderful staff and facilities at the Sun Hotel." Although the award ceremony took place on Monday and was filmed by the BBC, it won't actually be broadcast on BBC4 until Friday (Feb 18), so there's still a chance to see what you missed, and who the rest of the award winners were. If you would like any further information about the Hitchin Folk Club you can email them on [hitchinfofolkclub@onetel.com](mailto:hitchinfofolkclub@onetel.com) or see their website at [www.hitchinfofolkclub.idnet.net](http://www.hitchinfofolkclub.idnet.net)

Andy Simur's band - The Occasion – is playing down The Hat Factory tonight (Wednesday) as a follow-up gig to their performance at the Tsunami Benefit gig last week which raised £1071.30. The band is now a four piece with Mr Sizmur on vocals, Andy Paris and Mark 'coops' Cooper on guitars, Steve Mcleod on bass and Mick McAlpine on drums and they describe their music as 'powerful anthemic guitar based songs'. Entry is free and the band goes on-stage at 9pm and Andy tells me that they will be giving away demos at the gig. You can check them out on the web at [www.theoccasiononline.com](http://www.theoccasiononline.com) from where there are some MP3 tracks available.

If you think that all folkies are old codgers singing sea shanties then you should get down to the Redbourne Folk Club tomorrow night (Thursday). Jim Causley, who is currently studying at Newcastle University doing the folk degree course there, is forging ahead in the popularity stakes. By all accounts he has all the potential of a top class entertainer with wit, voice, oodles of talent and charm. You can see him at The Cricketers (opposite The Common in Redbourn), for further information you can ring 01582 452954 or 07850 163241 or by visiting [www.redbournfolkclub.org.uk](http://www.redbournfolkclub.org.uk)

Adrian at the Horn Live Music Venue in St Albans is looking for more local bands to take part in their "Battle of the Bands". This is a great opportunity to play in an almost iconic local venue with prizes of; first prize £2000 cash, the second prize is £500 cash and the third is £250 to spend at a local music shop (The Music Dept). To take part in the competition, contact Adrian Bell on 01727 844 627. The venue's website is [www.thehorn.co.uk](http://www.thehorn.co.uk)

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## 23/Feb/2005 The Scene (Luton News/Dunstable Gazette)

### The Brian Heywood Column

#### *Live music in Dunstable*

Sometimes live gigs are a bit like buses, there's a long gap and then two come at once! Last Saturday saw a feast of independent music at opposite ends of Dunstable High Street. In High Street South, Luton's indie acoustic rockers – **The Tempest** – were playing down at the Blue Rock (formerly the Downtown) Café while The Imperial Vipers were gigging at the Wheatsheaf in High Street North. I managed to drop into the Tempest gig and had a quick chat to James Ingram (lead guitar and vocals) before the band's first set and he told me that they were just about to release their next single on their own label. Taking the leaf out of another local singer's book – Mark Joseph – they will be self promoting their new record to radio stations and the music business at large. You can find out more about the band and tap into some free MP3 music downloads from their website – [www.the-tempest.com](http://www.the-tempest.com)

The other Dunstable gig was a bit last minute apparently – the **Imperial Vipers** were filling in for someone – but they tell me that a lot of things are happening with the band at the minute. For a start they have now recorded their debut single (called 'Kick a Hole') which is being released in April and the band is in the process of recording a video to promote the single. In March the Vipers go back in to the studio to start work on an album with legendary producer Stuart Epps (Led Zeppelin, Oasis etc.) after which they will be touring the universities in April and May - including support slots with Supergrass and Trap 2. Find out more from their website at [www.imperialvipers.com](http://www.imperialvipers.com)

Talking about videos; just a reminder that the **Bowfinger** set at Esquires, Bedford, on Friday (February 25) will be filmed as part of the promotion for their next single. The Luton based band will be supporting Blind Jackson and 7 Storeys High at Esquires is in Greyfriars, just off Bromham Road, Bedford. More information from [www.latentlemon.co.uk](http://www.latentlemon.co.uk)

For a feast of Cajun stomp, Zydeco, Swamp pop and general mayhem you can see the **Bon Temps Playboys** on Sunday (February 27) down at The Horns pub in Watford which is at the top end of Watford High Street (or the bottom end of Hempstead Road) right next to the town hall. For more information call 01923 225020 or check out <http://users.aol.com/BonTempsPlayboys>

By the time you read this I will be in the frozen wastes of Quebec at the 'Strictly Mundial' World Music Expo in Montreal showcasing with **WoodworX**. I hope to give you a rundown of this unique event – at least in North America – when I get back next week.

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Send gig information to "The Brian Heywood Column", PO Box 649, Dunstable, Beds, LU5 4XD and you can also email details of gigs, gossip, web sites or anything else to [info@lutonscene.com](mailto:info@lutonscene.com). A searchable archive of the column is available on the web at <http://www.lutonscene.com>