

## 5/April/2006 The Scene (Luton News/Dunstable Gazette)

### The Brian Heywood Column

#### *Quicksilver Treat*



Tonight (Wednesday) you can catch **Quicksilver** over at the Orange Tree in Baldock (Norton Road). This is a gig for acoustic music fans who also enjoy a good laugh as this duo combines the incredible voice of Hilary Spencer - who was the vocal powerhouse behind the acapella group Artisan - and the wit and guitar mastery of Grant Baynham who was the comic song smith who appeared regularly on BBC TV's That's Life programme. About half their songs are self-penned and include all the things you can imagine doing with two voices and an acoustic guitar, plus some that you can't. The dynamic duo is well known for their on-stage repartee, so the gigs are by turns moving, funny, relaxed and occasionally jaw-dropping. The Music starts at 8:30pm and you can get more information on 0845

1232656, or by emailing [madnanny@questor-cp.co.uk](mailto:madnanny@questor-cp.co.uk), on the web at [www.madnanny.co.uk](http://www.madnanny.co.uk) or about the duo at <http://tinyurl.com/z2aac>.

Mike from the **Grapevine Blues Band** tells me that their sax player, Caz, will be fit enough to rejoin the band for their gig at the Three Horseshoes in Eton Wick on 21st April which is a great little venue to get back in the swing of things. He goes on to say that the full band has been booked to play at the first Northhill Blues Festival which takes place on July 15th near Sandy. Tickets are only available in advance and are limited in numbers so Blues fans need to book early and can do so by visiting their web site at [www.northhill-blues.org](http://www.northhill-blues.org). If you can't wait that long you can catch them tomorrow (Thursday) at the The Oak in 119 Green End Street, Aston Clinton just across the border in Bucks. Check out [www.grapevineblues.com](http://www.grapevineblues.com) for band news and gig listings

Bands like Grapevine represent the 'bread and butter' of the UK's live music scene and help keep up our tradition of going to see real music in friendly pubs and clubs. However, while publicans may be highly competent and professional beer retailers, sometimes they don't seem to have a clue about the music side. Mike told me an anecdote about a certain well known canal-side pub that had previously booked the Grapevine Blues band on a regular basis. As the band liked playing there - because they could chill out in nice surroundings - so Mike gave the pub a call to see what the score was and was told that the pub couldn't afford to book them 'because we filled the pub with punters and he had to work behind the bar serving beer'. Which I would have though was the whole point of the exercise. Nowt so strange as folk as they say up north.

I've just heard of another Open Mic/Jam Night taking place on Thursdays at the Kings Head in Market Hill, Buckingham. James at the pub tells me that all are welcome and that there will be a host band to provide backing, backline and PA. So along with the jam nights at the Greyhound in Dunstable on Mondays, 'open mic' gigs at the Madcap in Wolverton and the Horn in St Albans and the fortnightly Wednesday night Headstart sessions at the Hat Factory in Luton, aspiring musicians and singers are getting a good chance to get out there and hone their performance skills.

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## 12/April/2006 The Scene (Luton News/Dunstable Gazette)

### The Brian Heywood Column

#### *Metal Mix at the Student's Union*

On Saturday (April 15) you can catch a full night of live music at DTA Promotions' gig at the Luton University Students' Union. The programme features **Elements of Refusal**, **My Minds Weapon**, **The Fall of Boss Koala**, **Meet Me In St Louis** and **Apex** which is an amazing mix of local talent and bands from all over the country.

Local band **Elements of Refusal** are headlining, back in sunny Luton after completing their Spring 2006 UK tour and being featured on the front cover of last month's *Vandalism Begins @ Home* fanzine.



The band says that they are really excited about Saturday's DTA show as they rate all of the other bands on the bill. They also say that they will be doing their best to make it a night to remember, and may even have a few surprises lined up. The band came together from the ashes of several Luton bands in the early months of 2004 when guitarists Jon Morris (former Alpha High) and Greg Niedzwiecki (former Fridge-Mower) joined forces with bassist Matt Stock and drummer Simon Bortoli with the goal of creating music which would be both creative and of high quality, and in the process break down all genre barriers and transcend a number of styles to form something new.

Also on the bill are a Metal / Hardcore / Progressive outfit **My Minds Weapon** and **The Fall of Boss Koala** who hail from Dundee in Scotland. The Koalas have been around three years or so and play a unique combination of post hardcore and post rock. They say that they meld the crushing heaviness of Isis, the melodic sensibilities of Envy and the quiet/loud dynamic of Mogwai. **Meet Me In St Louis** will be trucking up from Surrey and are said to play a heavy frenetic style of art rock laced with near spoken word and passionately sung vocals along with jazz inflected style of rock.

Final band on the bill are local trio **Apex** who play grunge with a hint of jazz which sometimes sounds a bit like metal. They've been together since last July when Chris and Mark had a jam on the roof of Chris's house and realised that they had to form a band. So they asked drummer Chris Kingshott (ex - The Broken) to complete the line-up and Apex was born, named for the location of the initial musical meeting of minds. The gig will take place at the University of Luton's Student Union in Vicarage Street with doors opening at 7pm and entry is £5, see [www.dtapromo.co.uk](http://www.dtapromo.co.uk) for full details.

I hear that Roger King is giving up producing his Live Circuit email newsletter with news and view about original music in North Hertfordshire. After nine years of staring at a computer screen and churning out text about his beloved local music scene he's decided to call it a day and go back to simply enjoying the active local music scene that he has done so much to promote. Well good luck to you Roger and let's hope that someone else follows in your electronic footsteps and keeps the up the steady stream of news and opinions that help gather together the disparate threads that make up any local music scene.

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## 19/Apr/2006 The Scene (Luton News/Dunstable Gazette)

### The Brian Heywood Column

#### *Luton Lads rise to the Occasion*

Luton melodic rock'n'roll quartet - **The Occasion** – will be strutting their stuff on stage at Esquires in Bedford on Saturday (April 22). The band will be supporting new NME darlings 'We Start Fires' and they reckon that it's going to be a great show. The band started when the two Andy's - Sizmur and Paris – wanted to break out



of a musical rut and ably supported by drummer Mick McAlpine and Steve McLeod on bass guitar they are acquiring an enviable reputation as one of the best bands on the local music scene. Regular readers will remember that I've mentioned the band in the past but until recently they have been keeping their heads down a bit while they developed their master plan.

Singer Andy Sizmur explains "We want to produce some huge sounding songs, but without overkill. Some may include string sections." This means that they are planning to spend some time in the studio over the summer. Andy explains; "We are gonna produce it ourselves, sometimes bands can get hung up on the idea of working with a producer to mold them but who better to create the sound we have in our heads than ourselves?" This is a refreshing attitude as a lot of bands tend to rely on the 'magic touch' of a name producer rather than rely on the individuality of their own music and believing in their own abilities. You can hear some of their previous tracks at [www.myspace.com/theoccasionband](http://www.myspace.com/theoccasionband) or even better, you can see them perform live at Esquires on Saturday. Tickets are £5 and are available from the band on the night; you will be able to find them at the bar below the venue between 7pm and 8pm.

On Sunday (April 23) you'll get a rare chance to hear a couple of astonishingly good musicians; guitarist **Chris Newman** and harpist **Máire NiChathasaigh** when they play over at the Sun Hotel in Hitchin. Chris is a true master and **Maire** has been described as ".....the finest harper of her time." Together they are just amazing, breaking musical boundaries – for instance imagine bluegrass on harp. Winner of the Female Musician of the Year Award in 2004 - Máire is reputed to have reinvented the traditional harp. Bill Margeson of The Chicago Irish American News has described her as a musical genius and compared her to such great musicians as Miles Davis on trumpet, Ray Charles on piano and Django Reinhardt on guitar. Supporting act on the night will be Scottish singer/songwriter, **Michael Marra** who is one of Scotland's most prolific songwriters, and a much loved and respected figure in the entertainment business. The music starts on Sunday at 7:30pm and takes place at The Sun Hotel in Sun Street, Hitchin – more information available from 01462 812391 or [www.hitchinfolkclub.co.uk](http://www.hitchinfolkclub.co.uk).

After a really frenetic week doing gigs for St Patrick's celebrations I've not seen any gigs advertised for St George's Day on Sunday (April 23). It looks like the English are thoroughly ashamed of their music, art and culture.

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## 26/April/2006 The Scene (Luton News/Dunstable Gazette)

### The Brian Heywood Column

#### *A Musical Menagerie!*

Seminal Canadian alt-country band **OX** kick off their UK tour with a gig at the Wheatsheaf in Leighton Buzzard on Friday (April 28). Described as an indie hybrid classic fusing influences as diverse as punk and hillbilly, the band are a number one hit with Canada's National College Radio Chart. In fact they are the first independent record to top Canada's college radio chart in more than ten years which just shows that the wily northerners still have an independent spirit. They say that their music preserves the best of the tradition of the Byrds, the Flying Burrito Brothers, the Velvet Underground, Frank Zappa - the incarnation of deconstructed pop and vintage indie from the fertile heartland of the maple leaf nation. And it's not just the denizens of the frozen north that appreciate their music, Time Out enthuses; "With a voice broken, weary and elegant, Vancouver songman Ox (aka Mark Browning) plies a sensitive but scuffed, delicate but twisted variant on the cracked alt-country thing." So if you want to tap into a reflection of middle America - where trash and beauty meet - get on over to the Wheatsheaf (57 North St, 01525 374611). You can check them out on the web [www.oxmusic.ws](http://www.oxmusic.ws) and [www.myspace.com/oxmusic](http://www.myspace.com/oxmusic).



The **Imperial Vipers** tell me that they'd like to give a huge thank you to all their fans you who bought or downloaded their new single "Jewels". The initial sales have boosted the single into the rock chart as this week's highest new entry at number 10 just three weeks after release. They aren't resting on their laurels though, it's full speed ahead for the release of the album "Searching:Falling:Silence" which is due out on May 1<sup>st</sup>. In fact they're previewing the new CD at Filthy MacNasty's in Amwell St, Islington tonight (Wednesday) at an album preview party. The album will be played in full and there will be a special acoustic set from The Vipers at around 9.00pm. Entry is free and you can find out more about the venue at [www.filthymacnastys.com](http://www.filthymacnastys.com).



If you're looking for something a little stranger, on Sunday (April 30) you can see the extraordinary Wild Willy Barret's **Sleeping Dogz** at the Sun Hotel in Hitchin. This unique trio mix English, Cajun, Celtic and Moorish influences with a large helping of lunacy to produce a blend of highly emotive original music and arrangements. If you ever seen Mr Barrett's unique performance style you will know that you will be both entertained and inspired by the Dogz' repertoire of original material and arrangements. Wild Willy is perhaps best known for his successful partnership with John Otway throughout the 1970s and 80s, but his interest in acoustic

live performance was re-kindled after hearing the strains of a cello being interwoven around a group of musicians accompanying a belly dance troupe. The trio consists of Willy Barrett (guitar, fiddle, banjo, balalaika, vocals), Mary (cello, percussion, harmonium, vocals) and John Devine (uilleann pipes, whistles, harmonium, percussion). For more information check out [www.sleepingdogz.co.uk](http://www.sleepingdogz.co.uk) and [www.hitchinfolkclub.co.uk](http://www.hitchinfolkclub.co.uk).

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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>.