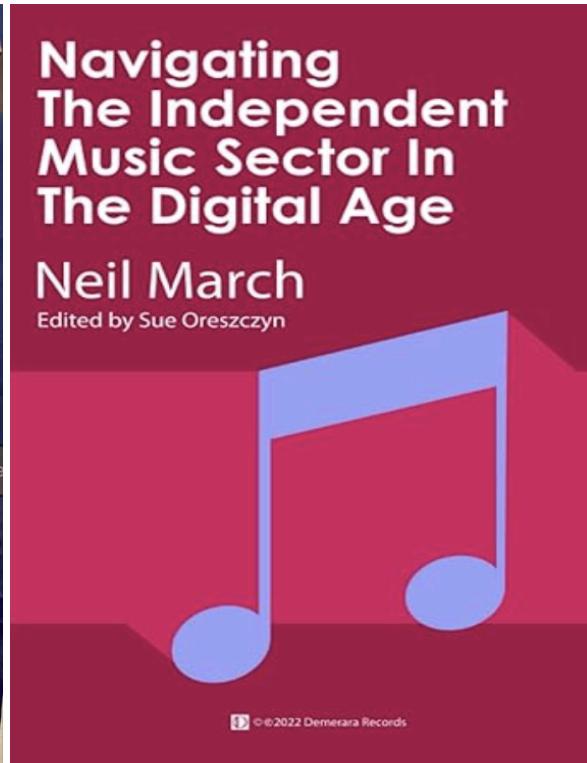
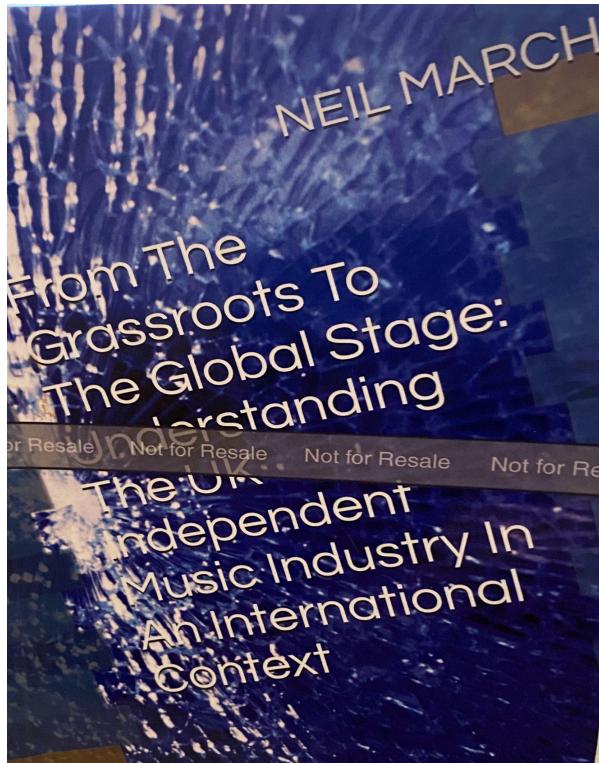


TRUST The DOC

TTD
TRUSTTHEDOC MEDIA

Edition 112: 31st January 2026

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THE HOTTEST NEWS FROM THE GRASSROOTS SCENE:

- **TIME FOR A NEW BOOK?**
- **ARTS COUNCIL: MINISTER TO READ NEIL'S ARTICLE**
- **NEW ONLINE MUSIC BIZ COURSE**
- **REVIEWS OF NEW RELEASES**
- **GUEST ARTICLE ON KICKSTARTER BY ALAN DREEZER**
- **CUTTING THROUGH THE NOISE**
- **MUSIC OF SOUND: PLANS FOR 2026**
- **OUR THOUGHTS ON THE MONTH AND MUCH MORE**

INTRODUCTION:

A month into 2026 and, in some ways, it feels surprising that so little has happened! Grassroots music seemed to wake slowly out of the festive and new year season while we waited around for decisions on other matters affecting our activities in 2026. Then we reopened the Fresh on the Net in-box in mid-January and the tracks came flooding in!

All the same, for the two of us, it has been a month characterised by waiting for news and decisions that materially impact on our plans. So we have spent the past few weeks doing a lot of preparatory work for marketing campaigns and areas we need to research.

This has not prevented us discovering some cool new music though. This edition includes reviews of 45 new releases by grassroots and independent music artists across the usual wide spectrum of genres. There should be a greater number in Ed. 113.

We also have singer-songwriter and fellow FOTN moderator Alan

Dreezer's highly informative article about the challenges of running his crowdfunding activity through Kickstarter and an article about cutting through the relentless noise on TikTok and other platforms from well-meaning but sometimes slightly overwhelming industry insiders, influencers and commentators dishing out free advice like it's going out of fashion!

Also, some interesting news and a follow-up on Neil's recent article analysing Baroness Hodge's report on the Arts Council which is going to receive a response from a DCMS Minister.

So we hope you enjoy reading this, our 112th edition of what we should probably be calling a journal rather than a blog, given how it has evolved over these past nine years.

NEIL MARCH & SHERRY SAHAYARAJ
31st January 2026

[Instagram](#); [BlueSky](#); [Facebook](#);
[Threads](#); [TikTok](#); [X](#)

(TTD Logos by **PaulFCook**)

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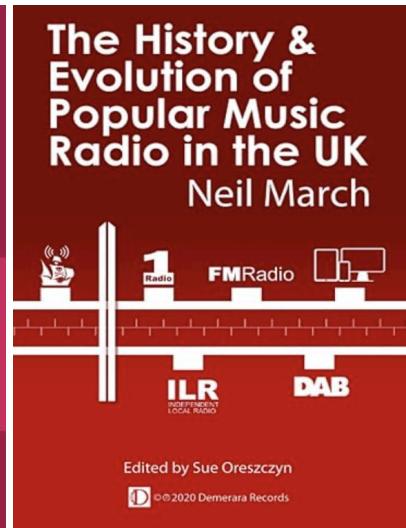
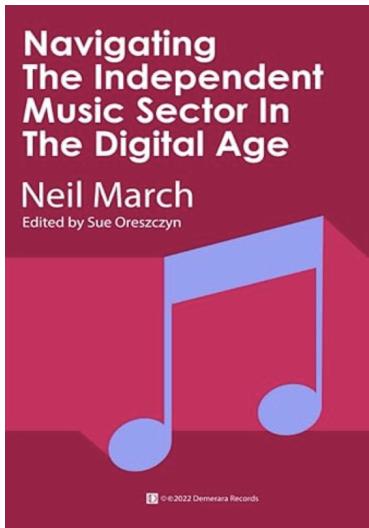
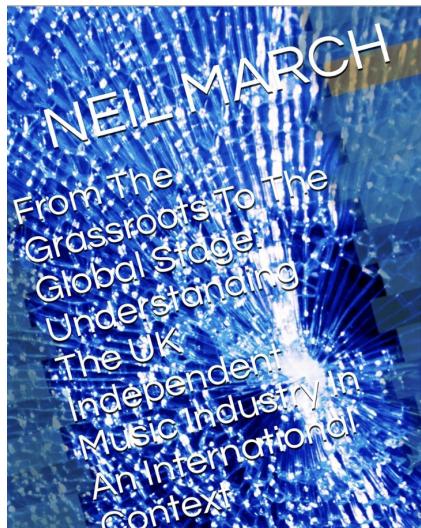
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PART ONE: NEWS AND INFORMATION: EDITION 112

TIME FOR A NEW BOOK?: NEIL SETS THE SCENE



Having written and published five books about music and media since 2019, four of which are on broadly the same subject, I had seriously hoped my last one would have a little more longevity. I am painfully aware that the music industry is perpetually fluid and driven by continuous changes and developments as new services and facilities come along. So I did my best to provide a book that, while acknowledging my inability to tell the future, would have sufficient advice to retain its relevance longer than my previous attempts. That book was *From The Grassroots To The Global Stage: Understanding The UK Music Industry In An International Context*. And trust me, that was the shortest title I could come up with that seemed to capture the key areas the book was addressing!

In my defence, I think the book has been more successful than previous attempts in this respect. It remains on the reading list for several BA and MA modules at ICMP where I lecture and its use by other academic institutions surprises me periodically when I receive payments from ALCS. In most areas of the industry and media the information remains up to date and relevant. Explanations of how record companies, publishers, artist management, booking agencies, synchronization, distribution etc. work are still correct [in so far as it is ever possible to be 100% accurate in describing such things]. Advice on artist development, how to turn promising songs into great tracks, how to approach appointing managers and putting fair arrangements in place etc. also remain relevant.

Yet, within months of publication, I was already feeling frustrated at the way new services had come along that I would have liked to have analysed and commented on and new advice and information were informing my understanding and perspective on digital marketing, streaming and general strategies in ways I would have loved to have shared. And it is those matters that are convincing me that, despite not wanting to write another book on the same topic so soon after the last one, perhaps I need to suck it up and get working on book number six in less than eight years!

Fundamentals of why this may be necessary

The point of publishing a book that seeks to provide sound advice and guidance is that it reflects the current state of the industry and how to respond to it.

For the majority of potential readers, the primary incentive is likely to be that either they are aspiring music artists hoping to carve out their own careers or they aspire to work in a key role that supports successful artists directly or indirectly. So knowing about the range of external services being offered to artists and those representing them is vital. At the time of publication, my previous book failed to analyse or comment

on services like Musosoup and Groover that have become such prominent and affordable avenues for artists to achieve reviews, features, interviews and playlists. It also has little on playlist pitching services like YouGrow Promo and it does not provide sufficient intelligence on utilising TikTok for profile building and fan engagement (albeit it does talk about this). It also fails to provide the level of detail in how to analyse and learn from Spotify streaming data that I would be able to give in a new book.

So you can see already that there are pretty vital elements at the heart of how we strategise in 2026 that are either absent or insufficiently covered in the 2024 volume. Maybe it doesn't matter and students [and other readers] should simply be advised that the book is useful but needs to be read in conjunction with other more recently published materials. I am aware that I could spend the rest of my days trying and failing every couple of years to write the perfect book about the [mainly] UK Independent Music Sector! Perhaps I should leave it to someone else to write the next book on this subject.

A Revised Edition?

I have considered whether the solution might be simply to provide a revised, updated edition of the

last book. This would mean inserting sections where I can provide new information and insights and rewriting passages that need to be updated or infused with a greater degree of detail.

There is a potential problem with this approach though; namely that, if I am going to provide a new book with new information and advice, I will want to rearrange the format and order of subjects. In my head, the revised edition involves re-evaluating the importance of some topics and chapters by comparison to others.

I also have my meticulous and talented editor and close friend Sue Oreszczyn to consider. Sue steadfastly refuses to accept any royalties for her work and it is a potential drain on her time too. Sue is busy with family and other commitments so I would not want to be causing her an unfair amount of work for my indulgence.

The Option Of Doing Nothing!!

I obviously do have the choice to do nothing. I could just point out that my last book still has a substantial degree of useful and relevant advice and information but needs to be understood in the context of what the sector looked like to me in the summer of 2024 and read in conjunction with a good range of contemporary

literature on the same broad subject.

After all, it is hardly as if the world is waiting with baited breath for another Neil March volume! So maybe I am worrying unduly about protecting my own reputation rather than fulfilling a clear need. Perhaps feedback on this might help.

Conversely, regardless of whether I even genuinely have a reputation to protect, the sense of wanting, perhaps needing, to share knowledge that might potentially help people and to steer them away from past writing that is less relevant or accurate is strong. Being a university lecturer unquestionably influences this feeling because the requirement to be up to date with the knowledge I pass on is acutely understood.

Next Steps

The sense of responsibility to put what I think I know into book form and make it available at the most affordable price possible is driving my decision-making. If I am honest, I think a new book is inevitable. Now is a good time to get working, during my less busy new academic trimester and having marked all the MA and BA assignments from the previous one.

I need a more concise title this time. I feel like the new book should emphasise the journey of the independent artist/band and those who are involved with making that journey a successful one. More on how to manage, promote and market your work; less on trying to explain how each aspect of the industry functions although a basic understanding of that is still important. The last book can stand as a kind of elaborate manual on how the independent music sector works. The new one will focus on the journey

The new book will also be a co-write with Sherry who can bring her knowledge of marketing, social media and content creation to the party. That input from a much younger, more marketing and tech savvy person will be a huge help.

We have decided on a working title of ***UK Independent Music - The Creative's Journey***. Short and concise for a change! We will cover getting started on the journey (artists or those in their support structure), building a following, handling the live music eco-system, promoting music to a range of media, organising tours and much more i



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ONLINE MUSIC BUSINESS COURSE: READY TO ROLL



TRUST THE DOC MEDIA:

The UK Recorded Music Industry Stage One (Part 1)

After months of talking about this, we are ready to launch the first of our online courses. ***The UK Recorded Music Industry Stage One*** will consist of two slideshow-style PDF documents and a video that participants will need to go through in detail before submitting a 4,000 word written document on a subject of their own choice that is relevant to the course.

Successful applicants will receive a CPD-approved certificate but, more to the point, they will receive a wealth of information about how the industry works and how to navigate its various elements. In order to put affordability at the top of our priorities, we are only charging £150 to apply which is less than any other education providers we have come across. A lot of the material in the course mirrors what we teach our MA and BA students. Once an individual has paid for the

course, they will be sent the PDFs and video along with instructions on what they need to do. They will be able to contact us to seek advice and guidance and to check that their choice of subject is suitable for the course.

The course covers the current situation at global, national, intermediate and grassroots levels, placing the evolution of the recorded music industry in an historic context. It also looks into different areas of the business, what they do and how they function. It additionally covers artist development, talent management, digital and social media marketing, promotion and royalties collection. You can register your interest [here](#). And we can then email you with details of how to apply so you can decide whether this is something you want to do.

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND: MINISTER TO RESPOND TO NEIL'S ARTICLE FROM TRUST THE DOC !!!



Supported using public funding by

**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

The ever hard working and consultative Labour MP for Lewisham North **Vicky Foxcroft MP** is going to share Neil's article (Trust The Doc, Ed. 111) with a Minister for the Department of Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). Readers may recall that Vicky held a round table meeting in Lewisham in September at which Neil was invited to speak on the issue of Arts Council funding. She was standing, at the time, to be on the government's DCMS Select Committee and was subsequently elected to it.

Since then, Baroness Margaret Hodge has produced a report, commissioned by the government, on the Arts Council. In Ed. 111, Neil provided a detailed article, analysing and evaluating the report, interpreting its significant points and talking about what needs to happen in response to it.

Neil shared the article in an email to Vicky when it was published on 31st December 2025 and she wrote back characteristically promptly, praising the article and offering to share it with a Minister who would then have to provide a formal reply to it. Neil has obviously accepted the offer. So now we will wait to see what kind of response he receives.

As with the round table, where Vicky listened to the concerns of local people involved in the arts and creative industries and then summarised the meeting with a checklist of aims to pursue if elected to the Select Committee, this is an example of democracy in action. Of course, we know Vicky is a very good MP and is passionate about arts funding and supporting the creative industries. But this will be a test of where the government's thinking currently is in relation to Baroness Hodge's report which they commissioned.

[THE] MUSIC OF SOUND: 2026 PLANS IN MOTION

Stats this period ?

Jan 20, 2025 - Jan 19, 2026 · Worldwide

Listeners	Streams	Streams / Listener	Saves	Playlist adds
86,887	139,874	1.61	1,340	6,766

2025 has been an exciting year for our band [\[The\] Music Of Sound](#). We ended the year on 140,000 streams but the more important statistics were the 7,000 adds to people's personalised playlists and the 1,400 saves of our tracks to listeners' personal libraries plus the 400 'active listeners' out of 12,986 new ones and the steady monthly listeners figures of between 12K and 15K over the past five months since the awesome Serge Wenus started adding our tracks to his amazing playlists.

Early in 2025, when we first started engaging the services of YouGrow Promo, we were thrilled just to see our tracks on playlists with huge followings and engagement and seeing our streams rising by hundreds every day. But, in truth, the vast bulk of these streams were 'passive'; people hearing us on a playlist they happened to have on in their car, home, gym, pub, cafe etc. The ratio of saves to streams has risen markedly since Serge got

involved in helping to drive our performance. Two obvious reasons. One being that he is a genuine fan (as we are of his music too) and therefore has followers who are more likely to share his tastes. The other is that he has added us to playlists that appeal to fans who like the 80s/90s vibe that is a big part of our sound.

2025 also saw us play our confidence-building summer tour and then headline our Brilliant Brent event in October. Our live set has evolved rapidly over the year since we played The Bedford in late 2024 and we are a better and more comfortable live band now than we were then.

So, as we gear up for trying to build on those little successes in 2026, what do we intend doing? Currently, our most popular track *Cold Weather Man* is enjoying another surge in streams so we are focusing on pushing that track. It

will surpass 50,000 streams by the end of the month.



Then, our new single *Tyche* (pronounced Ty-Kee if you are curious, Greek Goddess of Uncertainty and Chance) is out on Monochrome Motif Records on 20th February so the promo will kick in on that release campaign from tomorrow (1st February). Production-wise, it's our most ambitious single so far and we feel it is our best as well as being perhaps a little darker and more serious despite its anthemic chorus.

We gave it a one-off exclusive spin on the Trust The Doc Radio *Best of 2025 (Part 2)* show on 3rd January where it got a positive reception but we were especially pleased that the super talented Poetical Nadz highlighted the breakdown in the mid-section and how it brings everything back in with extra backing vocals. It is our favourite part of the track too so her observation was a little boost for

us. We also have another three tracks recorded, two unmastered, and new material being written and recorded too.

We created a private SoundCloud playlist entitled 'Emerging Album' so we could listen to 11 tracks in a provisional running order and consider how they sounded as a first draft of an album. We have no plans to release one just yet but it is good to know we have so much material for when we do. No filler here! Potentially every track could be a single which hints at the style the album will probably adopt when it is made. So what next for [The] Music Of Sound?

Following Advice ... Tentatively!

We have had a lot of advice from others in 2025. Among them one of our musical heroes and influences as well as a creative entrepreneur we admire, Simon Raymonde (Cocteau Twins/Lost Horizons), head of Bella Union Records. Simon confirmed what others have said about the importance of the TikTok engagement strategy and of being the best live band we can be. He also pointed us to two established PR/Promotion outlets he swears by and who we would love to try out if we can gather a bit of spare cash for that purpose!

We have been learning from others in the industry including Akira

Records boss Stevie 'Red' McMinn's relentless TikTok posts about what artists should and shouldn't be doing! Sherry spends a lot of time researching video and written content on music marketing and Ellie has turned out to have very useful knowledge of social media engagement strategies even though she is not a big personal user of social media.

So we are trying to apply what we have learnt while also keeping a sense of perspective about who the likely audience is for a band like ours and recognising that what works for mainstream Pop artists is not always going to translate well where a Synth Dream Pop trio is concerned.

There are, of course, dissenting voices who are railing against the relentless TikTok, Instagram, YouTube Shorts engagement approach and wanting to get back to more old school methods. We accept that musicians would rather spend their time being creative than having to spend hours every day on social media. But then it has always been the artists who are prepared to put in the work, even when it is arduous and stressful, who have tended to reap the benefits.

Ultimately though, every artist has to decide for themselves how they

want to pursue their dreams and whether they want to shun Spotify, TikTok etc. We are not commenting on others' choices; just focusing on what we are trying to make work for us. It is so hard out there and people need to have a sense of realism about what we are all up against.

Our hope is to be able to cobble enough cash together to trial using one of these established promo outlets. We already know how to present our music in the correct professional way (one of the benefits of receiving so much material from good pluggers etc. for the radio show and for this journal) and we have an attractive EPK that is, in a very real sense, a living breathing document that is continuously updated. But even though we are presenting our new releases to the correct production personnel in target radio stations and shows and the correct editorial staff in key journals, we lack the direct contacts to get listened to and taken seriously even despite the stats we are able to produce to support our campaigns.

That is why, when push comes to shove, money still talks and 'who you know' [or are prepared to get to know] can open doors. If we could open a few that we have been banging on for the past year, that would be pretty special. We

don't need a record deal though. We are already signed to the wonderful Monochrome Motif Records.

Our Next Tour

We have earmarked June for our next tour. It makes sense in terms of other commitments we all have. It also affords us sufficient time to put arrangements in place a little less hurriedly than last time.

A fundamental aim for this tour is that we do not want to be responsible for being the promoters and door managers at any of the dates. On the 2025 tour, we had to manage the door at two of the gigs and act as the promoter for three of them. It did not prevent the tour being a success but it was a burden we would rather have avoided. The gigs where we were able to just turn up, soundcheck, chill out and then perform were, not surprisingly, the ones we enjoyed the most (albeit that the final gig in Brighton was still a very special occasion for several reasons including it being Neil's birthday and his bandmates surprising him with an on-stage cake presentation at the end of the gig!).

So we would love to put the tour in the hands of a reliable booking agent. Sparing that, we need to target one-off arrangements in

which we are not the promoter and can just focus on being a band.

We would also like the tour to be a few dates more than last time and to take us further afield. We did try to get venues in Wales but were disappointed by the venues' poor attitude to answering emails (even when we could see they had opened them, including the follow-up ones!). So we have already been putting the feelers out and tentatively putting provisional dates in the diary.

How Far Can We Realistically Go?

As our recent single declares 'We Are Dreamers'. But we can also be pragmatists. When it is part of your job to know a lot about the music industry and how everything works, it reinforces your sense of realism because you probably appreciate more so than a lot of fellow artists just what you are really up against.

That should never be an excuse not to have ambition though. We believe in our music. We are buoyed by the fantastic response to it on Spotify and by how well we were received by live audiences in 2025.

Maybe having a 62 year old man in the line-up could be deemed commercial suicide but then it has also been mooted in some quarters as a unique selling point, especially

with the other two band members being young female artists, duly presenting a cross-generational collaboration as something that can work even if we are the exception that proves the rule! Pop Music is and always has been a ragingly ageist environment but it is a great deal less so than it once was, witnessed by BBC Introducing's panel unanimously voting to book Neil for their stage at Latitude in 2017 as a then 54 year old solo artist. Social Media has helped that situation, enabling users to set new rules and reject old industry-led prejudices.

Anyway, we stand by our music. We have fantastic support from Andrew Hartshorn and Monochrome Motif Records, the best mastering expert (Mark L Beazley) in independent music working on our tracks, the amazing Del Owusu directing our videos and helping us in various ways, the awesome Serge Wenus championing us on his super-engaged playlists plus some really good people around us helping in different ways. So we will just keep pushing our luck and whatever will be will be! Never give up on your dreams? Amen to that!



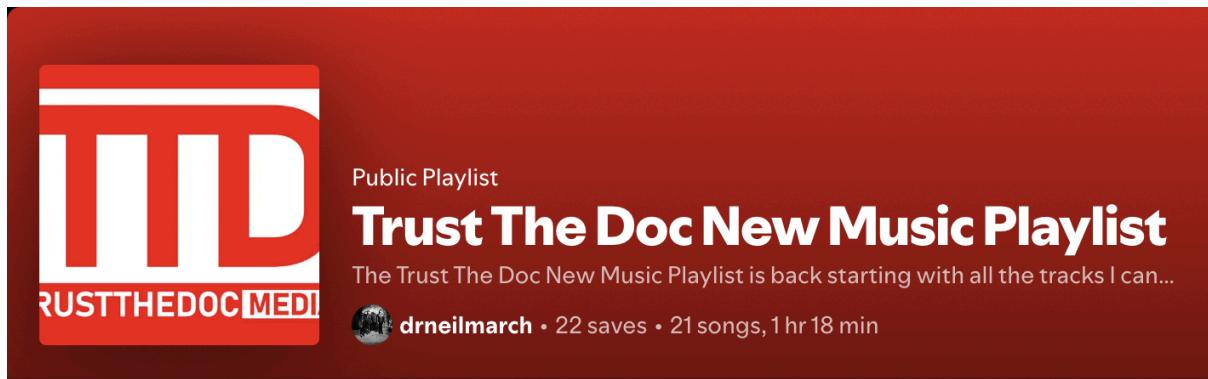
TRUST THE DOC RADIO: UPDATE



The [Trust The Doc Radio Show](#) goes out to a lovely, lively and engaged audience every Saturday at 5PM UK time and mixes the best current grassroots artists with the best established ones plus some fun features that get the audience involved and enable Neil to play some classics. The two hours always fly by.

If you aren't familiar with the show, come and check it out at 5PM UK

Time every Saturday on <https://exilefm> or catch the podcast over the ensuing 7 days on <https://exilefm.com/podcasts/trust-the-doc-radio-47>. Also please like, follow and stream the [Trust The Doc New Music Playlist](#) on Spotify which we keep updating with tracks that are on our radio show playlist (if available to stream) [here](#).



PART TWO: REVIEWS OF NEW MUSIC

With Fresh on the Net reopening in mid-January and artists generally emerging from the festivities, there were still less new releases than in

an average month but nevertheless, we found 45 singles and albums to review.

ALBUMS & EPs



It was exciting to receive the news that Belfast's Alt Rock/Shoegaze warriors **Consolers** have a new album out. **Deep Breaths** is out on 20th February. Consolers crashed into our lives with the superb **Inhale** about a year ago and have been frequently played on our radio show and regularly reviewed in TTD ever since. Since recording the album, drummer Josh McCullough, who plays on all tracks, has left and been replaced by Iain Minford. The remainder of the line-up is Sonja Sleator (Vocals), Daniel Lynch (Guitars & Vocals), Ethan Hanna (Guitars & Vocals) and Sean McCann (Bass Guitar). Sonja and Daniel wrote all the songs on the album.

It kicks off with the single **Inhale**, the track that first brought

Consolers onto our radar. Sonja is in fine voice and the lyrics are daringly sexual and clever with it. The contrasts of colour, dynamics and chord patterns are a feature that is heard throughout the album. **Watcher** starts with solo bass sounding a bit like early Joy Division but soon grows into another epic wall-of-sound slice of Shoegazey Alt Rock with a killer chorus. There is a little of Shirley Manson about the way Sonja's vocal leaps up and down the register.

This rich combination of Sonja's powerful, rangey vocals, the two guitarists' instrumental play and BVs, busy fluid bass and drums that have a lovely 'live' sound and are punchy continues throughout the album. **Sink On In** has a cool

riff and syncopated feel. **Left To Prove** drives in a mid-tempo with great fuzzy guitars and an engaging melody, especially the chorus which is quite special. **Down** is slower and has some sparkling harmonies and dynamic contrasts. **Make Me Feel** has an anthemic feel with harmonies in fourths and inventive guitars. Again, the live quality of the drums brings such an infectious energy while Sonja's vocals have shades of Elizabeth Fraser, dexterous and overlapping.

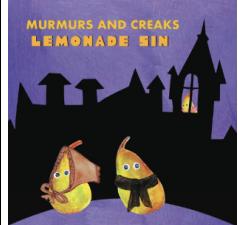
Play changes the mood with its evocative almost folky intro as Sonja sets out the tune over drone and the bass and drums play teasing stabs. This soon develops into a giant of a track with bendy guitar riffs and a killer chorus. **Town** gets straight to it with a driving intro and contrasts the translucence of the verses with

another anthemic chorus and some mind-spinning harmonies. **Zombie Jesus Day** is in a similar tempo but takes us in a different direction, more Rock-infused. Then **Boiled Over** begins slow and chugging but soon snakes and snarls its way into a much bigger beast of a track. Final track **Driving Me** nearly didn't make it onto the album. Sonja came up with it while driving to work the day after recording had finished but a hastily organised session saw it come to fruition and what a great finish it offers, the band's chemistry at its finest while the vocals are gutsy and expressive; again lifted further by great open harmonies. A fitting finale to an album that is big, brash, full of great melodies and riffs and driven by positive energy throughout.

POP NOODLES

None this month.

ALT ROCK & INDIE



1. Satellite
2. Spaniels
3. Making Coffee
4. Tschüss
5. Chungking Express
6. Gongoozle
7. Vitosha
8. 10th December
9. Neon Hearts
10. The Clock

Even after being regulars in these pages and on our radio show for nearly eight years and releasing a high volume of new music throughout that time, [The Happy Somethings](#) still have the ability to surprise us. And so it is with their new single **Meanwhile**. It is, in Happys terms, one of their biggest production numbers to date with big multi-tracked guitars and [shared] vocal harmonies that are a big contrast to the translucence of the *El Elu ku* EP.

There are quite a few influences potentially at play here. I hear elements of Glam (I'm even thinking Wizzard!), Beachboys, Supergrass, Scott Walker and probably a whole lot else. The double-tracked guitar acrobatics are a nice surprise and the way the track builds, keys becoming prominent in the closing stages too, is clever, nuanced and dynamic. This is pop music of a high standard, driven by positive energy and making full use of the Happys' combined vocal and instrumental skills.

[Lyon Tide](#) return with ***Escapism***. The Birmingham trio are building up to a proposed album which, worryingly, they have hinted may be their last. It is hard making albums at grassroots level which is why a lot of artists don't tend to release them. Either way, *Escapism* reminds us of their quality and the interband chemistry that is at the heart of their sound, punchy and energetic with intricate instrumental interplay but always with strong melodic content.

It has been more than a year since we had new material from **Andy Cordle** and **Bobby Sox** aka Hastings' [The Barbarian Horde](#). So it was a joy to receive their new single **Beta Max**. Characteristically whimsical and sparse Alt Pop, they combine their two distinctive voices cleverly with what begins as a self-effacing tale of feeling as though a lover has set the bar low by choosing them before later hitting us with the twist that they have, in fact, met someone else! In between, we get contrasts of mood, switching between Bobby's upper register vocals and Andy's deeper register response. Add

catchy tunes and nice interplay between guitar and keys in trademark TBH fashion and it all equates to another uniquely engaging, sardonic and enjoyable track.

There is a distinctly B52s-ish vibe about [Lemonade Sin's Murmurs And Creaks](#) but then throw in a smidgen of 86TVs and a dash of Pozi and you may get somewhere close to envisaging their sound. Gently driving Indie Pop with a cool blend of male and female voices. Melodic but not in a predictable manner and giving off a positive energy plus some chugging staccato piano in a fine tradition of many pop classics.



London's [Soundtrack Gospel](#) bring us **Body Love, Body Hate**. This is energetic shoegaze-infused Alt Rock with unquestionable echoes of Ride in a mash with Been Stellar while Swervedriver lurk in the shadows. The slightly low-mixed male vocals add to that aura, offset against wall-of-sound production with guitars jingling, jangling and sparkling over driving bass and drums. It is a compelling sound and they build the intensity of the track, turning its repetitiveness into a strength.

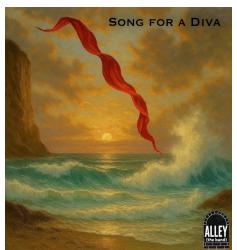
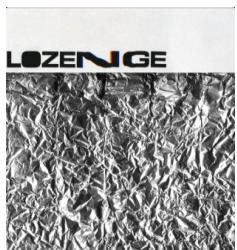
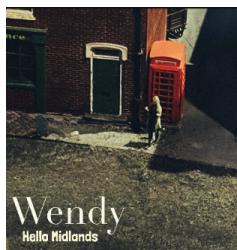
[Sonnen Blume](#) are a duo who have been on my radar for a little while now and my good friend and fellow FOTN mod, blogger and live promoter **Tony Hardy** has been raving about their new album. From it comes the single ***Making Coffee*** which is a kind of Alt Pop, Synthpop and Dream Pop hybrid with a laid back vibe despite the determinedly driving instrumental backdrop. Female vocals are distinctive, warm and slightly ethereal and there is even a slight Country-ish twang just to add another ingredient to a very agreeable mix and a tune that will lodge itself in your head whether you resist or not.

Highly likeable and talented Spanish Londoner [Nadia Sheikh](#) returns with ***Waiting***. This is less driving and rocky than her last couple of singles. A syncopated beat accompanies an appealing guitar figure and descending bass in semi-tones in the verses, giving it a slightly psychedelic edge. The chorus is contrastingly rich and has some goose-bumping vocal effects and a characteristically catchy hook. A little darker perhaps from Nadia but, as ever, inventive and

bristling with energy, all delivered in her distinctive voice. A strong start to 2026.

If you are drawn to the slightly unusual but in dreamy melodic vein, you will love Charleston, South Carolina's [Casey Wells](#) with ***Beating Heart*** (yes folks, first time ever having bands from both Carolinas in the same edition!). This is not just trippy psychedelic dream pop but the chords are pushed along like heavy waves requiring force to move them along, creating a very evocative effect (like a Cezanne painting set to indie music perhaps!). The male vocal is also very dreamy and almost sleepy and the combination of guitars, keys and vocals in the forefront of the track are irresistible. Love this.

It is always good news when there's a new track from Bristol's Indie warriors [Stay Lunar](#). ***Here With You*** has some trademark Stay Lunar attributes. Wall of



From Matlock in the East Midlands comes [Grund](#), an artist who played a memorable live set at our Vanishing Point gig back in June 2022, with ***Sound Of The Words***. This is an intriguing mix of

Sound production with guitars clanging and ricocheting while synth adds colour and the drums and bass drive relentlessly at the core of the track. Vocals start in the lower register, instantly melodic, but rise up as the track builds in power, momentum and intensity. Elements of shoegaze, Alt Rock and epic pop along with an infectious tune and great interband chemistry. A strong start to 2026 for the boys from Bristol.

Ewell's [Laura and Paul aka Broken Bear](#) are back with ***Sirens***. In a slow to mid tempo triplet time, this builds from relatively laid back beginnings and delivers lovely contrasts between the melancholic and subtly dark verses and the full on fuzztone-driven intensity of the chorus, reminding us a little of Garbage in a mash with Pixies while Breeders throw spices into the pot. And that, trust us, high praise indeed.

Psychedelic Pop, Garage Rock and more contemporary Indie. The edgy, trebly production works really well with the effect on the vocals and the repeating of the main hook, doubled by voice and

guitar is impactful as the track evolves around it. Plenty of energy too.

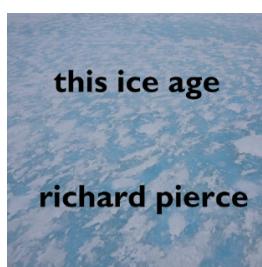
Our awesome friend **Iain Simons** aka [Hello Midlands](#) has truly created his own niche, delivering imaginative, cleverly evolving songs about highly relatable everyday characters, the latest encapsulated in the track **Wendy**. In a kind of slowly revolving triplet time, accompanied by strummed guitar, understated piano and a variety of other sounds that underpin HM's earthy alternative pop universe, this builds and builds with some heartwarming choruses, one of which may or may not involve Iain's amazing partner Ruth on BVs. Either way, this is another thoroughly unique and enthralling track.

There is no info about the whereabouts of [Lozenge](#) on their Soundcloud page but they bring us **Silver**. This is full-on wall-of-sound produced Shoegazey Alt Rock with a sea of fuzztone guitars jingling and jangling over driving bass and drums while relatively low-mixed

male vocal battles through the noise with an engaging melody. Bags of positive energy.

The utterly inimitable **Nick Woodgate**, TTD royalty and the artist [The Jojo Man Band](#) has a new track called **Fame**. As he dissects the relationship between fame and mental illness, he does so with trademark striking melody and lush arrangement as piano chords clang against strings-like synths, sparkling guitars and a generally dark cinematic aura. Nick's spoken elements are something we seldom hear on his tracks but they contrast his distinctive sung vocals cleverly. Another fine track from the JJMB, lifted by some great musicianship from Nick and his musicians too.

Our good friend **Frances Findlay** has sent us the new single by the band [Alley](#). **Song For A Diva** has a cool laid back feel, built around Ali's slightly dreamy soprano vocals and the band's sparkly jangle, creating a subtly psych-infused Alt Rock that you can easily drift away with.



TTD regular and purveyor of Welsh Psychedelia **Blokeacola** is involved

with a long-time friend in the project [Shrube](#) and they have a

single out called ***Poison***. It is quite distinct from Blokeacola in sound and style. Slow, developing around some fuzzy guitar play contrasted by strumming chords and a laid back beat, the vocals add to a dark but tuneful aura that sucks you in and keeps you hooked. Good stuff.

Indie legends and original pioneers of self-releasing way before digital, **Red Guitars** are, as you may recall, now **Undead Guitars** following the departure, in late 2024, of singer Jerry Kidd which led to complications over use of the band's name. ***Beyond The Blues*** is the second single to feature guitarist Hallam Lewis on vocals. It has a mid-tempo groove with strumming guitars, Lou's bass busy and buoyant and an aura of Americana about the song, somehow evoking images of dusty roads and Western-style towns. In one sense, it is a throwback but, in another, it is fresh and striking. A joy either way.

Brighton's indisputable Kings of Retro Pop **Barbara** return from an extremely successful year with ***Father Before Me***. This is a bouncy,

triplet time track that is unashamedly steeped in sophisticated 1970s Art Pop, echoing the likes of 10CC, ELO, Alessi Bros, Wings and a host of other such names. But of course, they bring all the youthful freshness, whimsical humour and polished musicianship along with contemporary production to make it clear that this is very much made in 2026 (not 1976!). Tuneful, thoughtful, humorous and naturally gift wrapped in a highly singable hook, this should put a smile on your face.

We were just about to sign off this edition of TTD when we received the latest track from Norwich's alternative poet and artist **Richard Pierce** and had to include it. ***This Ice Age*** delivers an almost Cooper Clarke-ish attack on the horror that is Trump's ICE fascists and their murderous discriminatory thuggery. The instrumental backdrop is almost warm although the sound effect has an iciness but it is Richard's words that matter here and he uses metaphor cleverly to make his case. A must hear track.

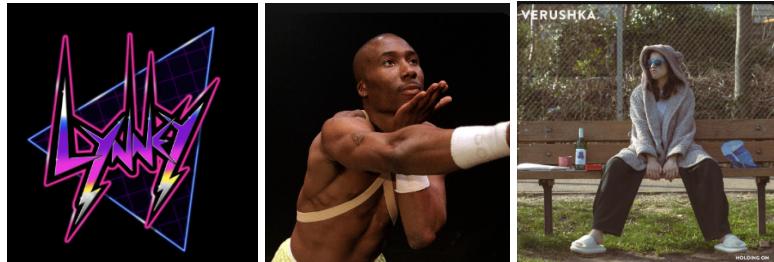
BEATS, RHYTHMS & RHYMES



TTD regular, friend and fellow FOTN mod [NX Panther](#) returns, along with regular partner-in-crime (or should that perhaps be partner-in-grime?!) **G-Herc** on the cool, syncopated Brit-Hop of ***Lightning Bolt***. The sparse backdrop with synths sliding across the mix against single staccato chords and a cleverly broken up beat provides the ideal

accompaniment to their contrasting voices. Panther is, as ever, passionate, full of character and highly rhythmic in her flow while G-Herc's voice is deep, rapid-fire at times and switching. It's a compelling track that demands our attention from the outset. Great way to kick off the new year after her successful UK tour.

SOULFUL SENSIBILITIES



Glasgow's [Lynney Williamson](#) returns with ***I See You***. This has an out and out 80s Pop-Disco vibe. Shades of Madonna in a mash with Nu-Shooz while early Whitney brings the coffee. Sparkling, synth-driven and sweet melodically, this is also broken up with some cool rhythmic shifts and breaks that keep events moving while some classic synth sounds add colour to the mix.

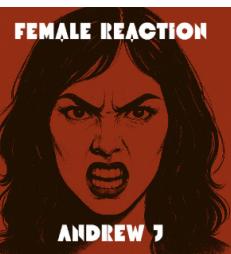
Wherever I chose to review Brighton's [Evadney](#) and [Plié](#), it would be the wrong choice because it is so genre-bendingly original and distinctive. Big loud reverberant synth tones bounce in triplets against the beat while lush chords sweep in and out of the mix. Evadney's vocals are big, expressive and full of yearning as he sets out his story. This is Soul but it's electronic. It's R'n'B but it's Pop. It's epic but with elements of

a classic ballad and it is synthpop but then it is most certainly NOT synthpop! Of course, what actually matters is that this is stunning.

London artist [**Verushka**](#) has a track called ***Holding On***. This is a dreamy, slightly funky slice of Soul with a kind of nineties vibe (think

Shanice, SWV etc.) adorned by some beautiful jazz-infused chord changes, plenty of accomplished musicianship and Verushka's rich alto tones that have echoes of Erikah Badu in a mash with Angela Jaeger while Carleen Anderson brings the sauce. Timeless, tuneful and very slick.

CLUB CULTURE

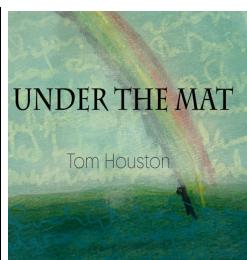
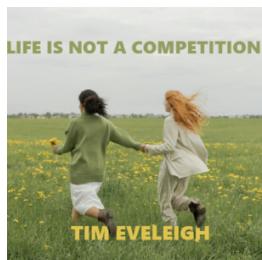


From Charlotte, North Carolina comes artist-producer **Logan Bruton** aka [**Gnarrang**](#) with ***Still As Bad*** teaming up with [**MBLIM**](#) from Phoenix, Arizona although I am not sure who the female vocalist is on the track. What I can tell you is that they list this as Garage on account of the beat (although it is intriguingly broken up and reorganised) and soulful vocal style but it is also incredibly dreamy and tripped out, bathed in echoing synths, lush chords and a generally ethereal atmosphere that is quite stunning. Lovely to lose yourself in or you can groove to it (albeit it will

keep you on your toes with its shifting rhythmic configurations!).

Andrew Jennings, from Warwickshire in the English West Midlands, is [**Andrew J.**](#) On ***Female Reaction***, he joins forces with an uncredited female singer whose agile vocals adorn his funky soulful House with high-mixed squelchy 80s bass, jazz-tinged synths, stabby horns, 90s piano chords and cool beat. The vocal overlaps work really well and the whole vibe of the track could be filling floors across the Mediterranean this coming summer.

SINGER-SONGWRITERS



Croydon's [**Tim Eveleigh**](#) returns with *Timeline*. This is an intriguing hybrid of styles with some cool rhythmic configurations switching between triplet and common time before suddenly veering off into a mid-section that is a complete contrast to the folk-infused Pop of the main body of the track which returns at the end. The blend of instruments between electric and acoustic is very effective and Tim's vocals and backing vocals ride breezily atop this complex mix of sounds and ideas, providing the icing on a very appealing cake.

Talented Londoner [**Adam Wedd**](#) returns with *For You I'll Cross The Sea*. Built around picking acoustic guitar in a I - V - IV - I configuration, Adam's passionate vocal performance is enhanced by folky violin and stirring instrumental arrangement. It has elements of Folk but also of contemporary Pop. Vocally Adam's performance sits somewhere between Sam Fender and George Ezra with echoes of various singer-songwriters stirring the pot but he has a distinct sound and the song reminds of us his ability to

craft organic songs and construct rich arrangements within which to convey them.

Newcastle-Upon-Tyne's [**Simon Taylor**](#) has enlisted the help of his brother and fellow TTD regular **Paul Taylor** to bring his piano skills to Simon's warm vocals and picking guitar on *Stars*. Lyrically and musically thoughtful, reflective and delicately played, this is a lovely track and rich in expression.

Tillicoultry's finest and TTD regular [**Tom Houston**](#) continues his return to action with *Under The Mat*. Produced and musically enhanced by his long-time friend and ally **Niall McColl**, this is classic Tom. Introduced by some shuffling sounds and instrumental colour, it soon gets into the swing as an organic acoustic guitar-led piece with Tom's instantly recognisable voice at the heart of the mix and boxy percussion. As it evolves, some sweet synth figures glide across the track and additional guitar brings an exquisite touch. Warm, reflective and expressive, this is a quality song and, thanks to

the level of performance and production, a superb track.

SYNTHEMATIC



We are doubly pleased to see our friend and fellow ICMP lecturer **Polly Mackey** aka [Art School Girlfriend](#) releasing a new single AND getting onto the BBC Radio 6 Music playlist. Polly is no stranger to major success of course and new single ***The Peaks*** is a reminder of why that is the case. Built around a teasing half-time beat and fizzing, almost drone-like undercurrent, it combines a cinematic synthwave aura with Polly's warm, distinctive alto range vocals and a melody that is instantly infectious and eats its way into our heads. There is a dark melancholy about this, almost a ghostliness. And yet it has a strange tranquility too. Evocative of vast open landscapes, much as its title suggests, this is an absolute gem of a track. Also check out the mystical otherworldliness of the accompanying track ***L.Y.A.T.T*** (which stands for Love You All The Time).

I am grateful to our friends at Plugged In PR for sending the new single by the amazing [Miso Extra](#).

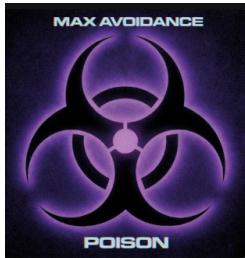
Right Here has a buoyant mid-tempo groove that even hints at a subtle reggae influence within her growling, buzzing synthpop soundworld. It follows on from the joyful and fresh feel of the excellent *Earcandy* album, demonstrating her desire to move on and show us more sides to her sophisticated musical personality.

Poland's rising star of Synthwave and Pop [and champion of fellow artists] [Serge Wenus](#) has a new single. Based on the title track of his recent album ***Other Side Of The Mirror*** has a lovely driving beat and chord switch between I major and V minor that has echoes of Prince jamming with Big Audio Dynamite while Howard Devoto drops in with some vocal drama. But don't be fooled by the retro references, the sounds he utilises are highly contemporary and the production is punchy and pristine. Also check out the 'B-side' ***Dzwonie (I'm Calling)*** with its lovely descending chord sequence in the chorus. All round great stuff.

TTD regulars, Dublin's [Action Rec](#) return with ***She On Top***. This is spiky, funky synthpop with some mind-spinning bendy synth playing

loudly over a cool spinning bassline, solid beat and vocals that have shades of Stereo MCs in a mash with Talking Heads. My favourite so far of their tracks.

ELECTRONIC & AMBIENT



The first new track we have received in some time from East Sussex's electronic ambient warrior **Dan Parsons** aka [Amongst The Pigeons](#) is the sonically engaging and harmonically appealing ***Morning Focus***. When I first looked at the title, my tired eyes read it as *Morning Fools* which would have been a fascinating topic! But never mind, it's certainly an interesting and inventive instrumental piece that rides along with sound bubbling and bobbing around the mix while the beat adds the glue. Great to hear.

TTD regular [Christof R Davis](#) teams up with **Edoardo Gastaldi** and **Le Code** under the moniker of [Daydreamers](#) on a track called ***You Were Earth (You Were Ocean)***. It evolves out of dreamy,

ambient synth chords and watery sounds into more of a classical piece with lush string play and enigmatic chords drifting into the distance besides running water, gusts of wind and quiet birdsong. It has a melancholy feel and becomes quite impassioned in its emotional power as it develops. Quite a beautiful track.

London/Wales artist **Hari Limaye** is [Max Avoidance](#) and the new single ***Poison*** is brought to us by our friend Sally Newman at The Songbird HQ. This is a trippy hybrid of hypnotic bass, screeching synths, reverberant guitars and enigmatic vocals. Well worth checking out.

CONTEMPORARY CLASSICAL AND SOUND ART



London-based post-graduate (MA) harpist from the Royal Academy of Music [Grace Tanner](#) is a name to remember because I have a feeling she is going to be huge. As her playing skills, displayed on the enigmatic *Rivulet* (composed by **Eric Burton Davis**), reveal, she has both the delicacy and expressiveness in her touch and interpretation along with the sense of adventure to take on such a striking modally inflected piece. Davis is a young Texan composer, based in the UK, whose style is crystalline and harmonically rich and adventurous. Grace's playing brings out all the piece's quiet, mystical beauty. This is a gem of a track.

Italian composer and pianist [Federico Gasparini](#)'s Soundcloud blurb says he writes for film scores. In *Walk By The Senna*, he brings us a quiet, lower register piece that could be a mash between Satie and Gershwin. The structure and arrangement are simple and minimal but there is an interesting use of jazz infusions and mild dissonances in the chord play. Intriguing track.

And while we are on the subject of pianist-composers with a penchant for the delicate touch and soft tone, Macclesfield's **Adrian Webster** aka [Crusaderbeach](#) returns with [*Unknowingly Entwined*](#). This is a solo piano piece that uses a triadic semi-arpeggio based left hand figure to accompany the melodic function of the right. Again, the feel is nostalgic and neo-romantic in style but it is skillfully composed and played and makes for agreeable listening.

Composer and artist [John Wellings](#) won't be winning any plaudits for breaking ground with his *Adagio For Cello And Piano* but I don't imagine that would be his intention. This is melancholy neo-romantic music mostly in minor key, very much diatonic with deep buzzy cello playing in a legato style against busy arpeggio-based piano. It sounds like it is possibly programmed rather than played live but that is an acceptable way for an independent artist to present their works if they so choose and it is

pleasant and expressive enough to be worthy of listening.

TTD regular and versatile composer [Christof R Davis](#) bags two reviews in two different sections this month. *Lunar* is a slow burning cinematic piece that, at

times, has echoes of Delius in the overlapping, beautifully configured harmony but then, as bell-like sounds take the lead, it moves into more filmic waters. As ever, skillfully composed and orchestrated. Beautiful stuff.

JAZZ & INTERNATIONAL JOURNEYS



Versatile artist [The Fantom Man](#) returns with *Why*. This is a laid back slice of ambient soundtrack-jazz that, in one sense, is a throwback to some of the great cop show themes of the 70s and 80s but then also uses a blend of

modern sounding synths with picking funky guitar and bass. There is also a complete change midway through into an outright funk-based B section. All instrumental with plenty of twists and turns to keep you on your toes.

FOLK & COUNTRY FARE



It has been a while since we had a new release from [Agent Starling](#), the unique duo of Red Guitars legend **Lou Duffy-Howard** and Hurdy Gurdy specialist **Quentin Budworth**, now augmented by Lou's son **Dexter Duffy-Howard** on

Violin.. **Jokul Frosti** is a full-on avant-folk gem with Lou's mystical spoken word setting out the story while her guitar and bass provide the robust contrast to Quentin's busy Hurdy Gurdy play and Dexter's intense violin playing

which, at times, veers into John Cale-type territory. They combine to whip up a sonic storm that is scary but exciting and, like all their music, refreshingly original.

Cardiff's (or I should probably say Caerdydd's) [Mared](#) has a new track out called *Bore Hir*. This mixes beautifully sung Welsh Language lyrics with deep, picking acoustic guitars playing patterns that have echoes of Janis Ian and Judee Sill

but, at the same time, have a clear contemporary feel. In any case, music so pure and exquisite is timeless.



PART THREE: OTHER COMMENTARIES

Building a Kickstarter in 2026: Fear, Faith, and the Reality of Independent Music: Guest article by Singer-Songwriter and FOTN moderator Alan Dreezer



Deciding to launch a Kickstarter campaign for a new album is equal parts excitement and quiet panic.

On paper, crowdfunding feels like a natural fit for an independent artist: no label, no safety net, just a direct connection between artist and audience. In reality, putting a campaign together forces you to confront some very real fears — not just about money, but about relevance, confidence, and whether you still truly understand your audience.

One of my biggest questions going into this campaign was a simple one: does my audience still want physical media, or is streaming enough now?

Streaming is how most people consume music day-to-day, and I'm no exception. But albums — the objects — still mean something to me. CDs, vinyl, artwork, liner notes. They mark a moment in time. The worry is whether that feeling is shared widely enough anymore to justify offering physical rewards, or whether I'm clinging to something that's quietly fading away.

Another fear was more personal: the fear of failure after making a lot of noise.

A Kickstarter launch isn't subtle. You talk about it on social media, you email your mailing list, you ask people to share it. You step into the spotlight and say, "This matters to

me.” If it doesn’t reach its target, that failure is very public. There’s no half-success on Kickstarter — it’s all or nothing. If the target isn’t reached, nobody is charged and nobody receives their rewards. That’s both reassuring and terrifying in equal measure.

I’ve been here before. In 2021 I ran a Kickstarter campaign for my album **H E A L E D**, and it did hit its target. But five years is a long time in the digital world. Social media algorithms have changed, people’s disposable income has changed, and attitudes towards crowdfunding may have shifted too. I couldn’t assume that what worked then would automatically work now.

What has changed in my favour is the infrastructure around independent releases.

Services like Elastic Stage and Teemill have completely reshaped how physical products can be offered. Instead of committing to large, expensive print runs and hoping they sell, I can now use print-on-demand. That means CDs, vinyl, clothing and merch can be produced individually as orders come in. It keeps prices realistic, reduces waste, and crucially lowers the financial risk of offering physical rewards at all.

Understanding what Kickstarter actually does is also important, because it’s often misunderstood.

Kickstarter isn’t a shop. It’s a platform that allows creators to pitch an idea and ask for support to make it happen. Backers aren’t “buying” products in the traditional sense — they’re supporting a project and receiving rewards as a thank-you. That distinction matters, especially when you’re setting expectations and explaining why funding is needed upfront.

Setting the target amount was one of the hardest parts of the entire process.

Because Kickstarter is all or nothing, the number has to be realistic but sufficient. Too low, and you risk not covering costs. Too high, and you risk the whole campaign failing. The target needs to account for production, manufacturing, platform fees, fulfilment, and a margin for the unexpected — because something always costs more than you think it will.

On the creative side, I feel confident.

I believe the artwork, logos, and visuals are strong, cohesive, and reflective of the music. The reward structure feels accessible too: from £6 for a digital album download,

right through to a £100 bundle that includes vinyl, CD, a hoodie, and an artwork print. There's a clear entry point for casual supporters, and something special for those who want to go deeper.

Ultimately, this campaign is about trust.

Trust that there are still people who value albums as complete works. Trust that my audience understands the realities of independent music. And trust that

being honest — about fears, costs, and ambitions — is better than pretending confidence where none exists.

Launching a Kickstarter doesn't eliminate uncertainty. If anything, it magnifies it. But it also creates something rare in modern music: a moment where the relationship between artist and listener is direct, transparent, and human.

And that, regardless of the outcome, feels worth the risk.

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<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/alandreezer/nothing-changes-if-nothing-changes-made-with-you>

CUTTING THROUGH THE NOISE (by Neil)



This is not intended as a criticism of people who undoubtedly believe they are providing a free and useful service. They are almost certainly right in most cases. I would be lying if I pretended I didn't make quite regular use of the better advice.

The problem is there is so much of it now that it is impossible to turn on my TikTok timeline without being bombarded by [alleged] industry insiders, influencers and commentators dishing out information about how we should or shouldn't be managing our social media marketing, our live music itinerary, how we interact with potential fans and so it goes on.

Some of these individuals clearly have valuable experience and insights to share. Others sound dangerously like they are parroting and peddling advice that is anything but new or revealing.

I am also very aware that, as someone who chooses to be quite active on social media and believes in the importance of building a sound social media strategy, even I find it all a bit overwhelming at times. So, for the great many music artists who openly struggle with the relentless torrent of social media marketing and hyperbole, it must be tortuous at times. And then, whatever your relationship with social media, there is the question of who we should listen to.

There are always the cynics and nay-sayers who cannot stomach having anything positive to say about corporately owned social media platforms. But, for most of us who operate within the music industry at any active level, there is broad agreement that regular (as in very regular in terms of days, times etc.) engaging TikTok content is a key element of any aspiring music artist's strategy. But what

interests me is when the advice from sources I respect steps outside the usual parameters.

For example, at the time of writing, I have recently watched one of the daily doses of TikTok content by Akira Records boss Stevie 'Red' McMinn. McMinn can sometimes sound like a stuck record with his continuous promotion of TikTok as the answer to all our woes. But on this occasion, he was talking up a trend for older artists, those the big labels and media outlets wouldn't look at twice because of rampant ageism, who are now stealing a march on social media because, as he put it, 'they don't give a f***' what anyone else thinks and are just promoting their music the way they want it to look and sound. He also went on to point out that this was further evidence that being yourself and not being bothered by what everyone else wants and says is always the best way to be. He cited an old Chinese proverb that translates roughly as 'If you care too much what others think, you become their prisoner'.

A few posts later, there was another regular TikTok 'influencer' spewing out the usual conventional wisdom about how we should be posting several times a day, being consistent in our story telling, style of content etc. This is when it feels like the demands are simply not

possible to meet because most of us will never have the time on our hands that would be necessary to keep up with the intense volume of content we are expected to create.

In one twenty minutes-long stay on TikTok, I heard a number of individuals suggesting specific things I could do to give myself the best chance of 'going viral'. Some had interesting elements. Others were pretty unenlightening.

So what is the answer? First and foremost, no-one should simply try to grin and bear the noise coming from all directions if it is clearly a cause of stress and anxiety. And if you are an artist trying to build some form of successful music career but you find dealing with all the social media madness too much, you should seriously consider teaming up with someone who can handle the social media but who also gets what you are about as an artist.

In today's digitally driven industry, it is not unreasonable to treat a social media marketing lead as a member of your band. That is how important their role might be and you could share any financial gains with them if they help you get to where you want to be.

Do you *need* to have a social media marketing strategy? There

will always be those who reject or even ridicule the idea. But the smart answer is probably yes you do. But it doesn't have to look like everyone else's. You need to decide how you want to project and represent yourself and your music.

It is a good idea to have a reasonably researched analysis of your likely target audience because, in order to know where to focus your efforts, you need to know who you are focusing on. But you don't have to approach the subject like a smarmy marketing executive from a big label! You just have to be aware of the types of fans who are more likely to make a connection with your music. Most of the time, it isn't rocket science. Think about whose music you like that is broadly similar to yours, who you are influenced by etc. Sometimes Spotify's information about which other artists your followers like can be useful but equally, it can often be of limited value.

This is where the smug popsters who claim genre is dead or a thing of the past are actually no help. For most aspiring artists, being able to identify your own [broad] genre and link to others in similar territory can be incredibly important.

You do need to try to think strategically in our industry. That is also why I am always telling bands and artists they shouldn't keep playing countless gigs in the same locations. Better to play fewer gigs but make those you do play more meaningful and well attended. If you can tour at some point, that is also a good use of your time.

The live itinerary, the social media campaigns, the YouTube content etc. all needs to be as joined up as possible. Consistency of message, language, ideas and obviously the music must always be an aim. Easier said than done of course but music, like any other industry in which there is a desire to grow a customer base and bring in income, needs to be supported by efficient organisation and planning.

As for cutting through the noise, you need to find a way that works for you and with you. There is a body of opinion among the experts that says it is not necessarily the quantity of posts but the regularity. So, if you only have time to post once or twice a week, do it on the same days each week and do some research to identify the best time slot so you can stick to that too.

Regarding content, go with what you are happy to share and how you are happy to be represented.

And don't be weighed down by a mistaken desire to follow what you believe is fashionable. Learn not to follow but to be as good as you can reasonably be at projecting and representing what you and your music are genuinely about. Remember, it is always hard whatever area of music you operate in but it is, relatively speaking, a little easier to be noticed if your sound sits outside the commercial pop mainstream compared to trying to compete with the big superstars when you have nowhere near the money or marketing machine they have behind them.

So think about what really works for you. If you find all the social media activity stressful and it makes you unhappy, consider cutting someone in on your deal who can manage all of that for you but under your artistic direction. Produce content that represents you the way you want to be represented. So it could be that you

want people to see the 'authentic' you. But then it could equally be that you want your artist persona to be completely different to how you are in real life. Nothing wrong with that. You get into character when you are on stage, in a video etc.

The important thing is for you to always be controlling how you and your music are projected to the world. If you are thinking about what might be commercially successful or fashionable, my advice is to lose that thought and focus instead on how to make your music match your creative vision.

When push comes to shove, there will be some who get it. And they, frankly, are the only ones who really matter. If you are going to put in the hard graft that is usually necessary to be successful in such an oversubscribed and chaotic industry, you may as well try to enjoy it as much as you possibly can.



AND FINALLY

One month into 2026 and it scarcely feels like we have begun to get into the swing of it. Yet actually, if we take a step back and consider what has happened so far, a different picture emerges.

It has been a month of planning as much as anything for us. February will see the build-up to the new single by [The] Music Of Sound and the beginning of the marketing for our new online music business course. We also hope to be quietly putting the next summer tour together well in advance this time.

We are waiting on decisions from the Arts Council on several projects, one of which we should know about in early February. So fingers remain crossed for now. The case has been made robustly and with match-funding too but it is so tough at the moment and it will take time for any improvements to flow from Baroness Hodge's recent report.

In the socio-political world, there is so much that we are stressed about. Trump continues to turn the USA into a rogue fascist dictatorship with zero tolerance of criticism, ICE murderers on the loose in non-Republican states and openly corrupt practices carrying on with the tacit approval of the Republican Party and the House of

Representatives. Here in the UK, Starmer refuses to change the nasty racist rhetoric of the Labour Government, playing into the hands of Farage who continues to surround himself with disgraced Tory politicians and out and out racist extremists. His MAGA-style audience seems blissfully unaware of his plans to make them pay for their health treatment while the rich get tax cuts.. It is deeply depressing that, after thinking we had smashed the racists in the last century, they are now a greater threat than they have ever been. At the time of writing, the Labour NEC's decision to block Andy Burnham's attempt to return to parliament has just dealt another blow to the party's credibility.

Still, enough about politics! This is a journal about independent music. And there has been plenty of good stuff released this month both by grassroots artists and those higher up the food chain. Hopefully this has been accurately reflected by the content of the Trust The Doc Radio show on Exile FM.

So keep hoping for a better world. In the meantime, at least we have music and a grassroots music community that reflects all those better values of mutual support, love and tolerance.

NEIL & SHERRY xxxx

