

TRUST The DOC



Edition 117: 30th June 2026

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THE HOTTEST NEWS FROM THE GRASSROOTS SCENE:

- **NEWS AND INFO FROM GRASSROOTS MUSIC**
- **[THE] MUSIC OF SOUND: A PIECE OF WELSH HISTORY**
- **NEW ALBUMS BY ANDREW HARTSHORN & POCKET LINT**
- **REVIEWS OF OVER 60 NEW INDEPENDENT RELEASES**
- **SHERRY AND NEIL REVIEW THE FRESH ON THE NET FAVES**
- **MAISIE BEA ADDRESSES THE PRESSURE PUT ON ARTISTS**
- **NAT VALDEZ HERNANDEZ ON ARTISTS TAKING CONTROL**
- **NEIL ON THE VALUE OF MUTUAL SUPPORT BY ARTISTS**
- **NEIL ASKS WHAT'S WITH THE DEWY-EYED NOSTALGIA?**
- **OUR THOUGHTS ON THE MONTHS GONE BY AND AHEAD**

INTRODUCTION:

We kind of knew June was going to be an eventful month. And we were not wrong. Not least our [The] Music Of Sound single ***Ebbw Vale*** was released on 12th June which meant the campaign had kicked in by the beginning of the month. It was also a full-on month for new music coming at us from several directions and we have tried to reflect that by providing reviews of over 60 new releases by grassroots and independent artists in this edition.

The Football World Cup also kicked off in June. It has been a strange experience. On the one hand, there are few more exciting and grandiose events in the sporting world. This year there are 48 countries represented. But it has also been partly overshadowed by the utterly disgraceful conduct of the American authorities towards certain teams and FIFA's pathetic refusal to take any action or threaten any sanctions on the co-hosts for this despicable and corrupt practice. Instead they presented Trump with a trophy and have been sucking up to him to a genuinely stomach-turning degree.

It is impossible for independent music to exist in a vacuum free from political influence too and, with the current racist, xenophobic diatribe of lies and hate pouring onto social media every day, it was a relief to see Reform UK get their butts kicked

in the Macclesfield By-Election wherever you may stand on Burnham and Labour. Some things are more important than partisanship and defeating racism is one of them.

Meanwhile the Arts Council finally confirmed Sherry's global talent status which is fantastic news and, writing as Neil on this paragraph, what a great endorsement of her achievements since arriving in the UK in September 2022. Her journey continues onwards and upwards.

We have, as usual, some exciting guest contributors to this edition including two bright young ICMP BA students and music artists Maisie Bea from Brighton and Nat Valdez Hernandez from Costa Rica. Read their amazing articles in Part 3.

As always, there is news on our band including new single, next single and an exciting meeting with Jade from Memphis. We also report on an inspiring trip to Portsmouth to hook up with our close friend Dom Elton and the Mayfield Records team to take plans forward for our Arts Council funded project The Portsmouth Hub.

NEIL MARCH & SHERRY SAHAYARAJ

30th June 2026

(TTD Logos by PaulFCook)

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PART ONE: NEWS AND INFORMATION: EDITION 117

[THE] MUSIC OF SOUND: A PIECE OF WELSH HISTORY



ebbw vale
[the] music of sound

The new single by [\[The\] Music Of Sound](#) is **Ebbw Vale**, a song that contextualises the band's anti-fascist, pro-unity stance within the unique socio-political history of an iconic Welsh Valleys town. You can check out the video, directed by the amazing **Del Owusu**, [HERE](#). The single was released by **Monochrome Motif**

Records on Friday 12th June. It is available to purchase and download from [Bandcamp](#) and it can be streamed via [Spotify](#) and all the streaming platforms.

As ever, big thanks are due to our fellow artist and supporter of grassroots music **Serge Wenus** whose

popular playlists always have our tracks on them. We are also grateful to all the playlist curators who have added the single too including **Best Songs Of All Time** who have added us for the third consecutive single release.

Neil also had the opportunity to be interviewed live on air by the wonderful **Chris Phillips** on his Friday afternoon show on **BGFM Radio**, the local FM station for Ebbw Vale. Chris

and Jamie played the single on their Tuesday night show and have been giving the band fantastic support and encouragement, a reminder that it's the indie shows that really support grassroots music, not the pop obsessed BBC Introducing charlatans..

Reviews have been numerous and wonderful including Flex Magazine calling it 'spellbinding' in an eloquent piece you can read [here](#). See our [EPK](#) for lots more.

MOS: STEPPING UP OUR GAME FOR NEXT RELEASE



shimmer
[the] music of sound

We have decided to take the step, for the first time, of involving one of the top indie PR and plugging specialists in the campaign for our next single ***Shimmer*** which will be released by **Monochrome Motif Records** in August. So let us explain our reasoning including why we decided we wanted to work with the awesome **Jade Perry** at **Memphia Music PR & Management**.

Although we have, for some time, deployed YouGrow Promo to pitch for playlists and Musosoup to provide a range of reviews and features that we can cherry pick from, we have always handled our own media promotion via Trust The Doc Media. We know our work is of a highly professional standard because, having the advantage of seeing so many submissions from pluggers ourselves every week, we have adapted our media mailouts to match the best of what we receive including all tracks and links embedded and available in one click.

We also know we have the right email addresses for the right production and editorial staff. Yet we have found it hard to penetrate the target media outlets including those that much newer artists have managed to bag articles in

because they hired PR specialists from the outset and we didn't.

So it has made us realise that we need someone who has the relationships we lack with key media people. But it needs to be someone who, firstly, gets our music and, secondly, is a bit more versatile and doesn't just focus on airplay which is not necessarily the priority at this stage in our journey where rotation on the likes of BBC 6 Music is not remotely within our reach.

Fortunately, as broadcasters and writers, we get to see three important elements. Namely the quality of the submissions themselves; whether they seek reviews as well as airplay and the general nature and quality of the artists they represent. There are some very good pluggers and PR folk but, for reasons we won't bang on about here, we decided Jade was the right person for us. When she was so positive about the music and showed such an acute understanding of where we are coming from, that convinced us all the more. So we had an initial meeting and we are stoked with what she has set out as being potentially achievable at this stage. Now we can't wait to get *Shimmer* out in the world.

THE PORTSMOUTH HUB: AN INSPIRING MEET-UP



L to R: Dom (with Popsy), Neil & Sherry outside Mayfield Records. Pic by Mary Red

With everything in place to kick off our latest Arts Council England and The National Lottery funded collaborative project with our close

friend Dom Elton and his team at **Mayfield Records**, it was great to spend a day in Portsmouth with them. **The Portsmouth Hub** is a

project that sees Mayfield Records utilising their fantastic studio to record and release new tracks by a bunch of artists, offer them the opportunity to rehearse for free too and support them in the live space including filming clips to be put out permanently on YouTube.

Our (Neil and Sherry) role in the project is primarily to provide three educational workshops for the cohort but also to support the project with social media and digital marketing and any organisational support needed.

We had the opportunity to see Dom's new premises in the centre of the city with an incredible shop front on two adjacent streets; a logo we have seen on Mayfield products and posts for years but, where the old studio was in an outhouse next to Dom's previous home, the new one is on a main

street and has living quarters above the studio.

We also had the pleasure of being there when Mary Red was in the studio, engineered and produced by Sam who Fresh on the Net readers may know as Noodle Beard. The single they were working on was sounding goose-bumping and Dom also treated us to a number of other great tracks that are in the release pipeline as part of the project.

This is going to be a fantastic opportunity for some of the finest talent in the Portsmouth and South Coast/Solent area to have new music released, marketed and distributed while playing some cool gigs and getting some free education about the industry and media to help them be more confident about self-managing their careers in the longer term.



TRUST THE DOC RADIO: UPDATE



It has been a fun month for Neil in presenting the Trust The Doc Radio show every Saturday evening on Exile FM. There was, however, one Saturday in June where, due to his attendance at a junior football event involving family, Neil had to pre-record the show. It meant breaking up the usual live threads (although a few joined anyway) which felt frustrating but it did allow him to play a lot more tracks than usual which cleared some of the backlog of tracks awaiting airplay on the show. Normal service has subsequently been restored.

Join us every Saturday live and interactive at 5PM BST on exilefm.com; maybe have a guess or ten at the weekend's **WhatsTheWord** brain teaser and vote in the Show Closer poll. And if you join in the thread on X or Bluesky, you can compare notes with other listeners on any subject you decide to raise or contribute to. It is always good natured and mutually supportive.

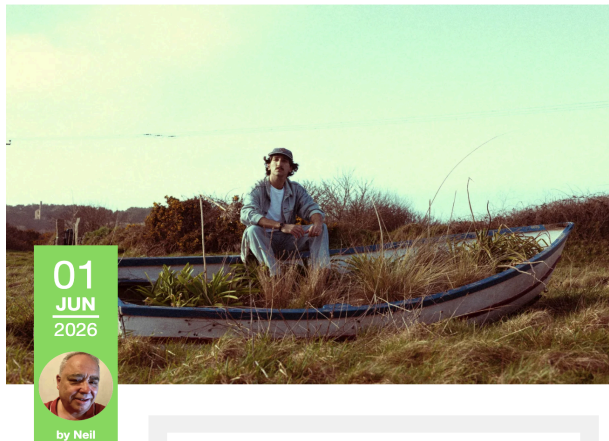
The show is dominated by current releases by grassroots artists but there is always a chunk of the show given to our favourites from the latest BBC 6 Music A and B Lists and similar sources. In June, that

has included tracks from the new album by 83 year old Sir Paul McCartney from *The Boys Of Dungeon Lane* and superb tracks

by Father John Misty, Ezra Collective, Bloc Party, Lime Garden, Little Simz and Khruangbin to name a few

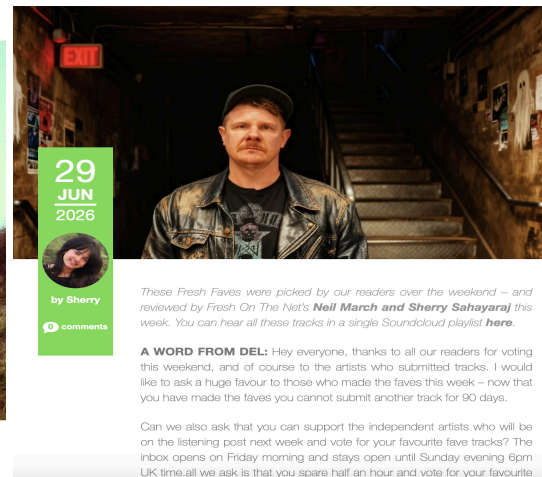
SHERRY & NEIL REVIEW THE FRESH ON THE NET FAVES

FRESH FAVES: BATCH 609



We were involved in two Fresh on the Net fresh faves reviews in June. After Sherry's solo reviews in May, it was Neil's turn to review [Batch 609](#) on 1st June and then Sherry

FRESH FAVES: BATCH 613

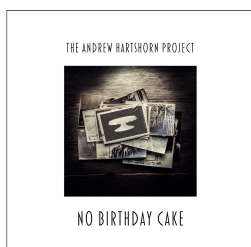


and Neil jointly reviewed [Batch 613](#) on 29th June. As always, there were some absolute gems, some of which have also been reviewed in this edition of Trust The Doc.



PART TWO: REVIEWS OF NEW MUSIC

ALBUMS & EPs



It's not every day (or month for that matter) that we get to review a new album by the founder of **Monochrome Motif Records**, the label we record for so this is very exciting. A new album by the Leicester-based composer and artist [The Andrew Hartshorn Project](#). **No Birthday Cake** is a seven track odyssey through the diverse spectrum of influences behind this highly personal work. Andrew has assembled a mouth watering team of musicians for the project too, namely himself on Keyboards, Composition and Programming, fellow TTD royalty **John Serrano** (Vocals, Guitar & Harmonica), another TTD regular **Richard Davies** (Saxophone) plus **Gary Alesbrook** (Trumpet & Flugelhorn), **Edward Givens** (Hassellian Horns), **Abel Boquera** (Hammond Organ) and **Maciek Szczyciński** (Double Bass). Mixing and Mastering is by **Adam Whittaker** (deluxemixing.com).

The opening track is **Preparation**, starting with ethereal open fifths wavering hauntingly, developing

into a cinematic ambient piece that could be the soundtrack to a desert scene in a movie. This is followed by the slow melancholy of the title track with some sweet muted trumpet from Gary and sliding double bass from Maciek. It develops timbrally and texturally but retaining its rueful aura, reinforced by John's deep, slightly gritty vocal and a sad lyric. Then comes the recent single **An Old Photograph**. This is pure quality, beautiful jazz inflected piano chords, John's gorgeous vocals, fantastic contribution from the horn players and a beautiful performance throughout the band.

Three Little Words begins with piano playing rich chords and a melodic figure before the track takes on a swinging shuffle feel and Richard's sax, high in register, takes centre stage, later joined by more muted Trumpet. **Those You Left Behind** has an enigmatic intro before a sort of Latin groove ensues. Edward's contribution is notable here and John's vocal has a jazz-influenced style while Abel's

Hammond Organ wails nicely against Maciek's open fifths bassline. ***A Life Too Short For Words*** has a choppy Soul-influenced feel that makes great use of the combined keyboards, almost Booker T-like. The album ends with ***The Dance Is Over*** introduced by a spread chord on the keyboard before a syncopated groove takes control with open cymbals adding to its jazziness and Richard providing some rich sax improv. John's vocals are soft-toned and expressive while the band swings and brings a lovely fluidity around him and the switch to a major key is particularly goose-bumping as his John's little guitar figure. Andrew also deserves praise for his drum programming which, throughout the album, is spot on. This finale once again underlines the extent of the musicianship on show here. A fitting end to a lovingly conceived and high quality album.

Another good friend of TTD with a new album out is **Mark Heffernan** aka [Pocket Lint](#) with ***Wunderkammer*** which translates from German as 'Chamber Of Curiosities'. Kicking off with ***From An Ancient Land***, we immediately find Mark in enigmatic but cinematic territory with guitar trilling and bending its way around long synth chords and ambient sounds. Then it's recent single

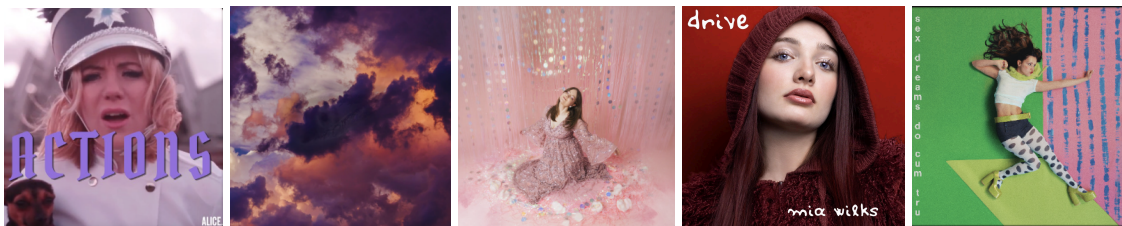
Amethyst Cameo with its early 80s synthpop sensibility, spoken words mixing with a vocal that recalls Glenn Gregory and a range of familiar influences accompanying a strong melody. Another recent single ***Cyanometer*** has a hint of Marc Almond about the vocal but the musical style is more in Depeche Mode territory. ***Clockwork Boy*** is in triplet time with clever chords and backing vocals plus a haunting sax courtesy of **Jonny Perl**. This sounds like a potential single. ***Odin's Eyes*** was the first of the previously unreleased track that we selected for the TTD Radio Show. Striking chords and picked guitar accompany an expressive and touching vocal. The beat is clever too.

Butterfly Collection begins with a semi-classical keyboard figure, scalic but with long chords beneath it. It continues in this vein with little sounds joining the mix. ***Nyx?*** follows with a more synthpop feel again and appealing melody. (***A Cartography Of) Desire Paths*** continues in similar vein but with an almost [earlier] Human League-ish feel, vocally and in terms of its chord structure. Two vocalists **Julia Indelicate** and **Monaz Parry** are introduced on ***Fernery*** with its swirling synths, unusual beat and infectious tunes. There is a classic feel to the

interaction between the vocals and fluid instrumental backdrop that, all at once, seems to point to elements of Gary Numan, Pink Floyd and Nation Of Language. This is possibly my favourite track for its sheer inventiveness and nuanced twists and turns. ***Heartbreak's First Teardrop*** is slow and more minimal instrumentally, bringing another contrast to Mark's expansive exploration of influences. A little of Colin Vearncombe here I feel. The

final track offers the intriguing concept of ***Punishing Moonlight***. It begins with slightly eerie deep keyboards and teasing long tones. As the strings sounds become more prominent, this feels more cinematic. It is a surprising way to end an album of this kind but Mark is full of surprises and it allows the work to float ethereally into the distance, rounding off another well-conceived and accomplished album.

POP NOODLES



The only predictable aspects of **Alice Offley's** music are that it will never be predictable and the standard is always high. The latest from her newer project **[Alice](#)** is ***Actions***. This has a slight sixties vibe, a little bit Motown while the Beachboys lurk in the shadows. Punchy, uptempo and dominated by Alice's yearning, agile vocals and clever harmonies, this will get inside your head before you know it. Catchy, sophisticated and, of course, really good.

Plymouth's **[Zahra Deljoui](#)** returns with ***See You In The Clouds***. This has an instantly intriguing atmosphere, partly rooted bass with chords changing around it and a melodic style that

reminds me a little of Zoe (who, incidentally, lives down the road from Plymouth these days). Zahra's voice floats and flies above this slightly mystical instrumental backdrop, driving home an appealing melody with a calmness that actually underlines the emotional energy.

Jenny Lahs from the Scottish Capital Edinburgh is **[Pinlight](#)** and her track ***Over And Over*** mixes some great dynamic and textural contrasts with elements of staccato synthop riffs, squelchy synth choons, echoing tenor sax, cool filter effects and sumptuous multi-tracked harmonies. Full of energy, very smartly produced and arranged, it provides an excellent

vehicle for her individual style and delivers a strong and memorable track.

Super talented 17 year old South East Londoner and the youngest ever Fresh on the Net mod [Mia Wilks](#) has a new single out entitled **Drive**. Mastered by Simon Frances (Olivia Dean), this is a song of great personal meaning and significance to Mia. Inspired by the disgraceful comments she endured from a music teacher at age 8, this is passionate, beautifully written and sung in a slow tempo and cinematic backdrop that allows Mia to stretch

out with her distinctive dexterous vocals and lush harmonies. That teacher needs to be made to listen to this ten times a day for the next year as both a punishment and a reminder of how unequivocally wrong she was. A beautiful way to turn childhood heartbreak into such a triumph.

[Piri](#) is in perky mood with **Sex Dreams Do Cum Tru**. In an uptempo triplet time with lots of whooshing synths and upward glissandi surrounding her sweet vocals and corresponding BVs, this is both fun and full of imagination. A simple but optimistic message too!

ALT ROCK & INDIE



Based in Australia, [Ah Honey](#) are a quartet who have been getting out and playing gigs and festival stages around Wallongong, Sydney and other places. **Lily, Matt, Rohan** and **Fin** are the band members and their streaming numbers suggest they are building a decent following so watch out for more news. In the meantime, we have **Only Man**. A descending chord and bass figure brings a spy movie aura. The guitars give an edge to their punchy sound while Lily's voice is strong, agile and expressive, turning up the dynamics as the track builds and the melody and

corresponding little riffs and figures circle around our heads.

[Josaleigh Pollett](#) has been making music for a decade and a half in Salt Lake City, Utah. With this track, they missed out by the tiniest whisker on what would have been a second time of making the fresh faves at FOTN. **The Witness** is an intriguing track. A driving beat is the constant here while the guitars, bass and synths kick up a sandstorm of sound around Josaleigh's yearning, compelling vocal performance. It definitely has something of The Smiths about it,

perhaps mixing it up with more contemporary acts like Goat Girl and a dash of Ash mixing with Caleb Followill while Peter Gabriel brings chops. Add to this a great tune and superb arrangement. This has emotional intensity, appealing fluidity and great vocals. Outstanding on every count.

The new single by Bristol warriors [Adult Leisure](#) sees them on scintillating form with ***View From My Window***. This is a giant of a track topped off by a Peter Gabriel-esque vocal (with a dollop of Steve Winwood maybe). The instrumental interplay is superb and achieves a cinematic intensity. Adult Leisure are going from strength to strength and this looks like being a big year for them too.

It's been a little while since we had new material from [Wild Horse](#). Now the boys from Burwash return with ***Moments***. Like a lot of their more recent material, this has more of a

pop sensibility than their earlier material. This suits Jack's gritty, rangy and expressive vocals and melodic flair. The guitar sound is agreeably clanging and fuzzy while the bass and drums are fluid and the band's chemistry is demonstrable. Complete with nice backing vocals, this is punchy, poppy and energetic.

From Salisbury in the English South West come [Carsick](#), a band who have been making serious waves over the past year and a half, with ***Social Smoker***. They have managed here to mix punchy, punk-pop with snappy guitar chords, teasing synths and distinctive upper range male vocals with some full-on wall-of-noise shoegaze abandon. This has everything. Great contrasts, superb interband chemistry, cool melodies, great vocals and a wealth of positive energy. These guys could be looking at a very fruitful year ahead, especially if they match their live reputation with tracks of this quality.



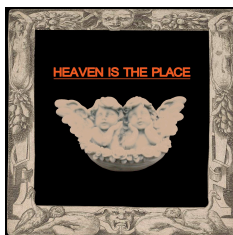
From Northwich come [Maximum Fun Club](#) with ***Make It Last***. A distinctive and slightly rueful sounding alto range vocal plays off against copious guitar jangle and country-tinged slide play while the rest of the band provide robust foundations. It is a striking mix

of classic Indie Pop and cool Americana with a nagging sense of sadness behind its positive plea. Add to that a killa melody and hook and this is a seriously likeable track.

The latest single from our Aussie exile friends and TTD favourites [Fendahlene](#) is ***Confusion***. From the opening sixties-inspired guitar figure, this bristles with energy, enhanced by superb drum track, the chemistry between Paul with his single fuzztone chords and guitar jangle and Ash's punchy, perfectly picked bass tones and Paul's passionate vocals, this rolls along with joyful power. The contrasts are clever, the harmonies are spot on and the atmosphere of a music-dominated road trip is infectious. Quite possibly their best single to date and there have been a lot of good ones to choose from.

The Happy Somethings' **Happy** continues his latest series of singles as [Happy As You Like](#). After the uptempo energy of *Take Your Breath Away*, ***Something Good*** is slower and the vocal has an almost Roy Orbison-ish vibrato. Lyrically it continues on Happy's theme of making sense and possibly something positive out of the horrendous state of our world abroad and at home. The melancholy undertones reinforce this.

[Monoland](#)'s ***P.Survey*** is presumably not a misspelt study of urination



From rural South Wales via Leeds come the ever-reliable [Maruspial](#)

although, if it was, we would most likely not know as the male vocal is buried deep beneath layers of reverberant and fuzzy guitars in a track that is all about creating textures and atmosphere, one of loud otherworldliness and underlying inventiveness. It might leave pop-oriented listeners scratching their heads but we love this level of power-driven yet introspective shoegaze at TTD. I just realised this track was recorded in 2013. It has certainly aged well then.

Sometimes a big brash slice of harmony-soaked melodic Alt Rock that wears an enormous smile across its collective chops is just what you need. So it is with Wolverhampton's [Sunday Dread Collective](#) on ***Dream Fever***. The Dread reference is nothing to do with any Reggae connection in case you were wondering. Imagine Teenage Fanclub crashing into New Radicals while Snow Patrol bring chops and you may be in the right ballpark (or maybe not!). Powerpop Rock with a large dose of optimism. We sure need some of that right now.

[Soup](#) with Pool Blue. This has a lovely vibe with Roddy Frame-like

guitars, Microdisney-ish keys, cleverly conceived bass and drums and a male vocal that is low register and so beautiful it almost croons like Richard Hawley in a mash with Kevin Ayers while Teenage Fanclub add flavours. It is such a superbly well-written song too and the nuanced arrangement and interband instrumental chemistry all take this to another level. Absolutely gorgeous.

Brought to us by the awesome Jade Perry at Memphis Music PR, we have the new single by [Oswald Slain](#). It is called Heaven Is The Place. Fresh from his US triumph, this is sung through some slightly filtered effect but the feel is epic Pop Rock a la Sam Fender meets Bruce Springsteen while New Radicals add spice. Crashing guitar chords and driving bass and drums underpin the instrumental arrangement while the vocal is big, brash and passionate, matching the heroics of a giant chorus with corresponding harmonies. A track to lift the spirits.

Sometimes a bit of refreshingly framed nostalgia can be just the thing and so it is with [Spearmint](#)'s 1986. It breezes along like Pulp in a mash with Aztec Camera while Maximo Park bring flavours, high tempo, tuneful, harmonised while controlled fuzztone guitars mingle

with friendly synths and everything locks in for the ride. References to that year's tragic space explosion, Newcastle being in Madrid and various other moments that meant something unforgettable to their youth. It has a freshness and energy that is irresistible and the hook is impossible to ignore.

The German female-male duo [Glimmer And Fold](#) are giving nothing away about themselves on their Soundcloud page but they have an unusual track called ***Flying Objects***. From the outset, the clever chord changes grab our attention and, as the track builds, more layers and nuanced contrasts lend it a feeling of momentum that, at times, is almost like a throwback to an inventive Rock style. Mostly though, this is dominated by slightly ethereal female vocals, imaginative writing and a quiet intensity.

Manchester's [The Falls](#) (plural just to be clear that this is not post-Mark E Smith Fall!!) return with ***Loaded Gun***. Fuzztone everything, guitars and bass, drive this forward along with powerhouse drums in a positive punky energy while a baritone range male vocal carries a catchy melody throughout. Bags of energy and raw musicianship. A breath of fresh air.



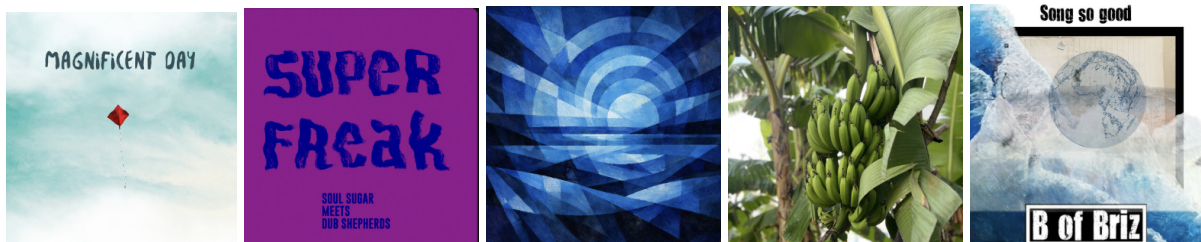
[Bureau De Change](#) are in no mood to compromise on ***The Gammons Lament***. The quartet, who have been making serious waves and tearing up some cool live venues, bring a surplus of bristling, burning energy from the outset. Drums kick it off followed by a punky guitar riff and then the bass punctuates the full instrumental onslaught upon which a tough mainly spoken female vocal describes the hapless mess of a character central to this tale. Old Skool Punk with enough invention to take it somewhere more contemporary.

The ever-reliable [Still Traffico](#), brought to us by our very good friend Mark Gee at 122 Music Management, return with ***Ford Cortina Girl***. With its echo vocals and tuneful guitar figure, there is a slight early Psychedelic sensibility

about it, reinforced by the long single tone BVs and 60s-style drums with the snare on the onbeat. But don't be fooled. This has an unmistakably contemporary feel too and is fresh as a daisy. Catchy, striking and impossible not to get sucked into.

TTD royalty **Nick Woodgate** aka [The Jojo Man Band](#) brings us what I think is a new recording of his song ***She's The One***. Uptempo, bouncy and with a cheerful disposition, this is a lovely mix of Nick's innate melodic flair and ability to put together an imaginative and highly energetic arrangement with some cool piano figures and guitar licks that complement his distinctive vocal and infectious catchy hook. Another big thumbs up for this.

BEATS, RHYTHMS & RHYMES



Sheffield's [J Kas](#) is in optimistic mood on ***Magnificent Day***. It sits in a

laid back mid-tempo groove with J Kas's distinctive rap style in the

verses and a catchy melodic hook. The instrumentation is mellow and offers up a sweet horn figure in the chorus. The combination of sounds and voices coming in and out of the mix all work really well while the beat is agreeably crisp, driving the whole enjoyable engaging experience along.

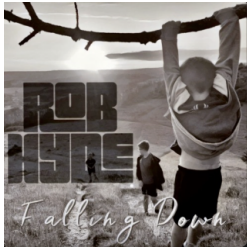
The intriguing [Soul Sugar](#) return, this time in collaboration with [Dub Shepherds](#) on a cover of Rick James's ***Super Freak (ft. Jolly Joseph)***. There is a heavy and experimental dub built around a bassline similar to the one MC Hammer sampled all those years ago. Spiky guitars, echoing keys and a plethora of ambient sounds dance and dive around the mix, keeping us on our toes and retaining a sparkle. The non-dub version is a complete contrast, led by soulful tenor range vocals in a call and response with harmonised backing vocals, great hooks and wailing organ to boot. Both versions are well worth taking time out to listen to.

North England-based TTD regular [Matt Mereport](#) teams up with **Elevator Icons** again on ***Formby Asparagus***. This has a Trip Hop and Dub feel, echoes of Massive Attack in a mash with Janet Kay and various other sources. The beat and bassline

underpin an agreeably chilled vibe while the synth horns repeat a lovely triadic figure and sounds dance in and out of the mix. A high register female vocal tops it all off with a sweet melody and the ending as the synths swirl and shimmy into the distance is a great touch too.

From Mandeville, Jamaica comes [Tha M3](#) and ***Banana***. This has a real Old Skool Dancehall vibe that recalls the likes of Gammah Kid and Mr Vegas but it also brings plenty of contemporary sounds and he has his own style in the way he breaks up the words and adds short staccato tones into his singing, interspersed with spoken word. This is fresh and full of vigour as well as being infectiously catchy.

TTD favourite [B Of Briz](#) returns with another example of her ability to use lyrics to convey a message within which there are more messages but the overall one is about humanity, unity and the power of ideas over hate and injustice. It's called ***Song So Good*** and it places her persistent wordplay against triplet time piano arpeggios and unusual beat, holding our interest throughout and adding to the positive messages out there right now, battling through the noise. Also check out the biting lyrics and arpeggio piano of ***Avarice***.



Bognor Regis on the English South Coast is home to [Rob Hyde](#) who teams up with **Oliver Rees** and **Richard Stott** on *Falling Down*. There is so much I could say about this track. It has a haunting yet hazy late summer evening vibe, emphasised by the reverberant trippy harmonies and

smooth scorching sax. The rap is reflective, thoughtful and talking about mental health and related issues. There is so much inventiveness and clever contrast throughout the track and the vibe is both soothing and slightly unsettling. Top notch.

SOULFUL SENSIBILITIES



Londoner [Azu Yeché](#) returns with ***Weak***. This is very much in Old Skool Soul territory with an Al Green-ish descending pattern and beautiful harmonies, especially on the opening word of each line in the chorus which is very effective. But there are also enough clever chord changes and modern sounds to bring this squarely into 2026. Azu's voice is sweet, dexterous and full of expression, adding to the emotional power of this excellent track.

It is hard to know where to review the latest offering from [King Zepha](#). ***Let's Get This One Thing Right*** is listed on their Soundcloud page as Ska but it

really isn't! It has some Ska elements in what is much more a Bill Withers-ish Soul Pop track mixing with some Dandy Livingstone sensibilities and a great vocal and instrumental performance. It is unequivocally Old Skool but it is so well written and performed that it manages to sound fresh as a daisy too.

[SHOLTO](#) teams up with TTD favourite and fellow Welsh Londoner [Phoebe Coco](#) on ***Everything Is Stolen Away***. This is a slowish steady-paced Trip Hop-infused and jazz-tinged piece of Soul-Pop with rich strings, sweet piano chords and shuffling beat. Phoebe's platinum alto range vocals provide an

expressive, dynamic and dexterous performance to add real beauty to an already appealing track.

CLUB CULTURE



The latest offering from TTD friend and favourite [Pimlican](#) is ***Baby***. This is more in straight down the line House than some of his music. No staccato piano chords and the female vocal is a series of repeating samples overlapping over a determined beat, syncopated synth chords, sirens and octave synth bass. It is energetic, tuneful and a floor filla all day long.

Regular readers will probably be aware that I am a sucker for a lush slice of Euro-Trance with melodic intent and that's what we have with [Lei Riposa](#) on ***Let Me Show You***. Big sweeping synth chords contrast with harder-toned staccato synth patterns. The beat comes and goes as does a female vocal. The atmosphere is ethereal and futuristic but also tuneful and dreamy.

SINGER-SONGWRITERS



The ever-reliable [Willie Dowling](#) returns with ***Carry On Refusing***. This is in a quick tempo and the frantic ascending vocals in the verse remind me of Sparks (which is something I wish I could say more often!). The chorus, on the other hand, has echoes of early Placebo while the piano in the mid-section could be a mash of Mike Barson and Jools Holland. Like all

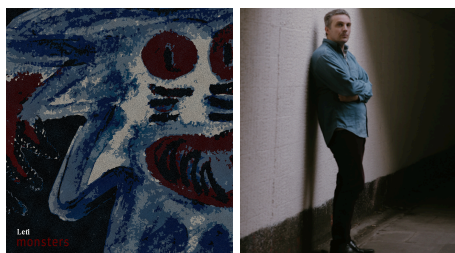
Willie's songs, it is full of ideas, utilises his accomplished musicianship and harmonic sophistication and tops it off with some great tunes.

Perhaps we need a retro pop section of its own in TTD with so many regular artists producing high quality tracks in this general ballpark. So it is with [Gurry Wurry](#) and his latest single ***The***

Gun Was A Quaker. This finds Dave in characteristically sophisticated classic mode with contrasting guitar figures, driving beat and sweet chords. His voice is distinctive and the harmonies add to a catchy chorus. Another fine tune from him.

Welsh singer-songwriter [Freyja Elsy](#) is a regular in these pages and her new single ***In My Veins*** delivers another goose-bumping example of her craft. Dreamy textures, rich beautiful harmonies, a nuanced instrumental arrangement and Freyja's stunning voice all over it. The melody is lovely and enhanced by clever dynamic contrasts. Genuinely outstanding.

It is difficult to decide where to review [Hydromag](#)'s single ***Changes***. Maybe I need to add a new section for Adult Contemporary or Sophisticated Pop or



Swiss-born London-based artist [Leti](#) was introduced to us by the amazing Freya Everest and is another part of our ICMP community. She has a new single out called ***Monsters*** and it lives up to her artist profile blurb. Reflective, organic but blending the introspective with dreamy soundscapes, delicate piano chords and Leti's streaming voice at the

foreground. Anyway, this breezes along with a lovely, slightly whispery laid back vibe, unobtrusive beat and mainly four piano chords at its heart around which everything else revolves including an agreeably appealing melody. A little gem.

London-based artist with French origins [Anelie](#) (not to be confused with Amelie) has a track called ***4-Entrance***. In a slow triplet time, this reflects her penchant for dreamy Pop with a strong sense of her French roots. Soft but assured, laid back but emotionally powerful, this track has a quiet sophistication behind its aural translucence. She has also been on BBC Scotland where presenter Phoebe H compared her to a 'creepy mermaid'!! Meant in a positive way I'm sure. There is certainly an otherworldly quality to this that is very appealing.

forefront, it is driven along by an agreeably crunching, mashy beat and gorgeous melody.

TTD regular and Newcastle-Upon-Tyne based singer-songwriter [Simon Taylor](#) returns with ***Bad Vibes Boulevard***. A I - VI minor-major seven chord structure underpins this tale of enduring some unsalubrious

characters Simon tries hard not to be dragged down by. The piano adds an understated but important contrast to the driving drums and

guitar chords. His vocals are, as ever, distinctive and conversational, a little Dylanesque.

SYNTHEMATIC



The latest offering from London's [Hazy Waters](#) sits somewhere between the poppier end of the Alt Rock spectrum and the punkier end of Synthpop. Either way, it is a joyful slice of cleverly contrasting powerpop with lovely soprano range vocal melody playing off against whispered spoken word and loud echoing synths battling with spy movie guitar, tuneful bass and solid beat. The production is excellent and there are enough hooks and detours to keep us on our toes.

The very likeable **Tim Blackburn** aka [Mistrust](#) has something of a penchant for writing songs based around colours. **White And Blue** continues this process. Tim's instantly recognisable voice, slightly deadpan but actually quite expressive, sits atop swirling and buzzing synths in a mainly three chord pattern while the melody is immediately infectious. 'White And

Blue is here for you' he repeats. Who are we to argue? Great stuff.

Polish artist and friend [Serge Wenus](#) is on a bit of a roll lately and **Close (Don't Cry)** introduces us to another side of his versatile creativity. This is more of a summery synthpop track with an instantly appealing melody and catchy hook around which Serge builds a clever track with lovely shifts in timbre and texture. The key change into the melodic middle section is a great touch too. Another of his best yet in our opinions.

If you like your synthpop to be loud, spacious and domineering, then from the opening synth riff, [Arcade Beach](#)'s **We're Electric** will take you on a fantastic joy ride. Big vocals, big synths, big everything and great tunes to match. There is so much positive energy pouring from every direction on this track

and it carries you along whether you like it or not. Top tune.

It isn't Synthpop/wave as such because they do use guitars but there is a synthematic aura to the new single by Merthyr's finest. [Martyrs](#) capture a kind of epic retro feel on ***Drowning Days***. Their

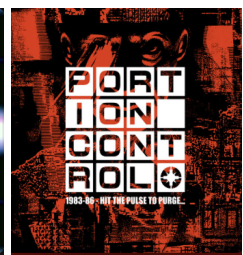
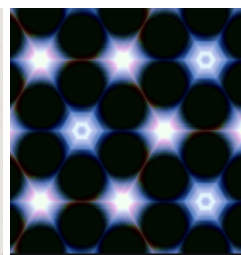
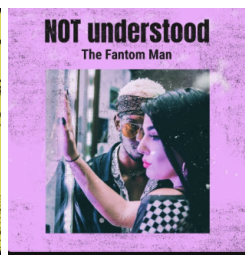


Australian artist and former Single Gun Theory frontwoman [Jacqui Hunt](#) returns after a long gap with ***Cape Of Light***. Her strikingly ethereal soprano voice floats into the centre of the mix over ambient synth tones and single bass notes,

email mentioned The Cure (which is highly evident in the guitar riff) and New Order, both good shouts. Maybe a hint of Future Islands too about the way this drives along with big synth riffs, dynamic tenor range vocals and spacious production. Full of energy and effortlessly tuneful too.

building the atmosphere as she stretches out and the instrumental mix fluctuates accordingly. This is a compelling listen and a reminder of her unique talent. Back with a bang (albeit a quiet reflective one).

ELECTRONIC & AMBIENT



Buenos Aires, the Argentinian capital (in case you didn't know!) is home to [Metadron](#) who brings the intriguing Alien Garden Party. Intriguing first for the production that has an 'other room' vibe while spacy chords could almost be from a seventies Sci-Fi soundtrack. It becomes more full-on and fluid as it develops but there are some sweet melodies, cool tritone chord

changes and a vibe that kind of fits the track's title. Good track.

TTD regular **Clive Newlands** aka [The Phantom Man](#) is back in electronic and ambient waters with ***NOT Understood***. It has a funky undercurrent and lovely bubbling watery sounds playing off against staccato synths and lush legato strings like an electronic artist

caught up in the arranging of the Love Unlimited Orchestra. The vocal is semi-spoken, deep register and kept to a minimum, adding to the aura of a cool track. Also check out his collaboration with **Furious Labs Productions** and **St3v3L33** on the enigmatic ambience and underlying jazz of ***CHEATER on 9th Street***

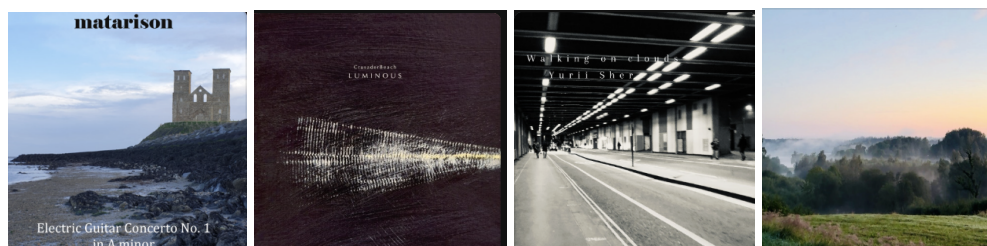
I could justifiably review [Dorian Cloudsley](#)'s ***Haildon*** in the classical section as it is a lovingly crafted composition built around imaginative harmonic language and melancholy melody but using an array of synth and electronic sounds where piano and strings could have been a less interesting alternative. The music develops through the fluid use of contrasting timbres and the quiet emotion behind it is affecting and beautiful.

TTD regular **Matt Couchman** aka [Lost Signals](#) has a new track called ***Spooky Action At A Distance*** which starts off like an agreeable slice of persistent electronica but

then adds a sampled financial ad and some trippier sounds and textures with a spacy feel, lending it a dark vibe and growing intensity.

We were really pleased to receive, via the excellent Lee Jackson at Wall Of Sound PR, a new single by the cult 80s Industrial legends [Portion Control](#), a band Neil saw at a festival in his youth. This is the **Ryan Fulber *Rebuild*** of one of their cult classics ***Refugee***. Crunching beats, great electronic sounds swirling around and a tough-as-f*** male vocal that sits somewhere between Jaz Coleman and Stephen Mallender, this has a lyric that could have been written last week, such is its biting relevance. Intense, dramatic and all round a compelling listen. Great to know they are still out there making cool tracks with no interest in fickle fashion or trending trash. This track gets better with every listen.

CONTEMPORARY CLASSICAL & SOUND ART



Canterbury's [Matarison](#) brings us ***Electric Guitar Concerto No 1 in A***

Minor which, as the title suggests, is using diatonic harmony although in

somewhere between a post-minimalist notion of gradually altering patterns and a filmic drama with clever orchestration. The opening *Allegro con fuoco* movement is cinematic and dark with strings dominating for long stretches before the guitar rides into centre stage with some fuzztone solo play. The guitar duels with the orchestra thereafter, producing some lovely moments that mix clever composing with smart sonic choices. The *Adagio* second movement is more mystical and harmonically impressionistic at times, making use of the guitar's sustain and related effects to create an Eastern element while the other sounds float and flutter around it in a growing dynamism. This is really beautifully written and played. The guitar, for the most part, acts less like a solo instrument, blending in with the strings and other timbres in the final *Vivace* movement.

[Yurii Sher](#) is in prolific mode at the moment and this time it is with *Another Day*. Long, loud profound piano chords lead the way against almost cautious, by comparison, single notes. Extensions add an

intrigue to the harmonic language at times. As it switches into a major key, the chords take on a dreamier feel with subtle jazz infusions here and there. The track reaches a dynamic climax and then becomes gradually quieter over the final stretch. Simple but effective.

Regular readers will probably know that Macclesfield's **Adrian Webster** is [CrusaderBeach](#) and he composes and records attractive solo piano pieces using diatonic but imaginatively constructed ideas. On *Luminous*, it sounds like he is using an electric piano setting of some sort which adds a mellowness to the tone in an appealing piece that builds melodic themes within the harmonic backdrop.

[Eduards Ozoliņš](#) returns with *Midsummer*. This is a moody stirring piece of piano and single strings (possibly Viola?) music in conventional diatonic language but imaginatively arranged and played with appealing dynamic range. It has a neo-romantic disposition and an underlying sense of ruefulness.

JAZZ & INTERNATIONAL JOURNEYS

Guido Spinnocchi
KAMMERMUSIK



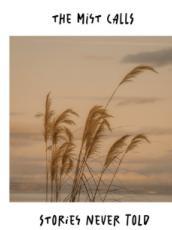
London-based Viennese composer **Guido Spinnocchi** describes ***Echoes Of Your Formal Education*** as contemporary classical on Soundcloud but it is quite clearly Jazz. A showcase for his multi-instrumental skills as well as his writing ability, it makes extensive use of saxophone and tuned percussion switching between reinforcing the main melody and then flying off into bouts of improv. The accompanying chords are cleverly configured and repeat for the most part but with occasional shifts that keep events moving. All very nicely done.

The inimitable **Mak Murtić** returns with ***Truth ≠ Tribe - M!*** Shifting rhythmic configurations, punchy brass, unusual sounds and echoing percussion, ambient noises on the wind and great melodic ideas all swirl around in this exotic melting

pot of musical creativity. Timeless in one sense but also thoroughly contemporary and fresh in another.

I had been tipped off by their wonderful and talented manager Birikiti that **Kongo Dia Nttila** were back and now we have ***Mathrobeat*** as a mind-spinning reminder of the breathtaking musicianship that **Mulele Matondo** and his bandmates aspire to. Complex, fast moving rhythmic configurations, absolutely scintillating high tempo unison runs up and down the scales, incredible riffs, lovely loose funky playing in parts and a track that never lets up. KDN take their unique fusion of Congolese Jazz and London's internationally infused flavours and create music most of us dream of being capable of playing. Go and watch them live and see how they make it look so easy! Welcome back to this outstanding band.

FOLK & COUNTRY FARE



Janie Price aka [Bird](#) recently supported Ward Thomas who, oddly enough, were the act we followed on the BBC Introducing Stage at Latitude in 2017 in what became the debut performance by [The] Music Of Sound (albeit a very different line-up to our current one!) Small world. **Havana Garden**, which also features **Jane Ellen Byant**, is in a slow triplet time with spread guitar chords and sweet folky harmonised vocals with hints of The Staves in a mash with the aforementioned Ward Thomas and perhaps a small dash of Laura Marling. Some sumptuous strings add a rich warmth to the mix and the switching between triads,

major sevenths and sixths and up to a IV equivalent is simple but very effective. This is a beautiful track.

Joe and **Milly** are young twins from Newcastle-Upon-Tyne performing as [The Mist Calls](#). On **Stories Never Told**, their special chemistry is evident from the outset. Close harmonies, sparkling guitars and lots of shifts in mood and tempo all characterise this imaginative and beautifully conceived slice of indie folk. Echoes of The Staves, The Shires, The Roches and others but they have their own sound and it is really worth taking time out to listen to.

PART THREE: OTHER COMMENTARIES

MUSIC PROMOTION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Talented young artist Maisie Bea continues the discussion about pressure on artists to be content creators with this insightful article



Living in times of digital age there is noise from all corners to adapt to as an artist. The narrative being pushed more towards us is that you must market yourself in short, digestible terms in videos to generate audience. The music creators leading the market are funnelling out attention-grabbing videos which is fronted as being the primary way to succeed in the industry; the nature of the algorithm feeding off shocking hooks, high quality and fast

passing which inherently contrasts to the core principles of art making. We have seen the shape of the artist change and even collapse from what it once was. The cultural landscape of music consumption is adapting to the digital world and defying what was once the infrastructure of the music consumer and music creation relationship. For example, finding new music through TikTok being a major for music discovery and how that defies logic of the

fundamental creation process for the artist. It becomes clear when the artists must follow trends to keep their music relevant. In this instance you would be required to dilute the meaning behind your song to a few key terms to catch attention to make people understand it immediately. As well as this the followers become more conscious of the artist and the space between the artist and consumer becomes less. An example of this is music artists sharing a video filmed on a bus to promote their music. Where this can be a way to achieve audience, it could be argued that the boundaries become thinner, and the music has less mystification. The demand for regular videos would eventually become expected which detracts away from the role of music making.

As a young songwriter and singer, I feel this weight heavily. Seeing my music through the eyes of a viewer count can be alarming and discouraging as a creative person. I can't help but question both the longevity and productivity for the artist to be posting so consistently without causing burn out or neglecting the work itself. Losing focus on the key sentiment to the craft is a risk for the artist. I believe the music itself should be the primary focus. This is opposed to the focus on making promotion

it feels like a sacrifice to the music itself.

Having these parameters around a creative process causes restraints in different ways as I mentioned earlier, mental health being a factor on what's on the line for music marketing for new artists. The stress demands different things from the artist and therefore creates more contradictions and challenges for the artist.

I find a sense of contradiction between the lifestyle needed to make music compared to what is being expected for success. Not necessarily suggesting there is a need for luxury lifestyle to make it possible but even just a compromise to a busy life. A lifestyle with moments of quiet and space. There is something deeply unproductive to me about sacrificing- there is importance in having time to sit and think without distractions. This valuable process of music creating, helping us understand ourselves and locate these feelings that theme the music. The inundation of noise in the digital world is seemingly crowding to a creative mind. This leaves no room for imagination and curiosity into culture and experience in the present moment. The need for real life experiences is crucial for music, after all no one is

writing songs about scrolling on Instagram.

From what I understand, observations are the fuel to any form of art. For example I am consuming the world constantly which creates ideas that therefore create the work i make. This might be watching the way trees interact with the wind that might spark inspiration to my writing. This idea will then multiply itself that I then have an urgency to materialise these ideas on paper for example.

Having restrictions on the time frame for general thinking and essentially daydreaming will limit the amount of time that we observe the world around us. Realistically, whilst experiencing life there must be time to process emotions that we can therefore speak about and understand our own manner in our marketing. In my opinion creating short form content at high quality and the quantity of every day will pressurise the music and put the longevity of the artists career at risk. Alternatively, it can therefore lead to completely forgetting about ideas due to having less time to sit down with them and loosing (for me) my creativity stream.

To view the situation as fairly it's important to recognise the positive aspects of online music promotion.

For example, it being a tool which is accessible to most people makes it more of a level playing field. Generating an audience is something that can be done with little to no resources. I believe online promotion is a good way to leverage what already would be a preexisting presence to elevate it in front of more people. Staying connected to listeners is easily a strong method to bring the relationship closer and generate connection to the fanbase. It can help open communities of people with similar identity, struggles and passions. This will help better develop the community around the music.

The shift in roles for artists is not light at all. Having to think analytically of your own work and seeing the world process it at the same time as you do is seemingly damaging. I would argue the shift has not only changed the role but multiplied it, making it essential to be multifaceted with technical skills like photography and videography as well as analytical skills, editing skills, visual understanding and communication skills.

The moment of freedom comes to the artist when the idea catalyses itself into an experience that will then become immersive consume them to producing something. This meditational state is only achieved

through a level of self-expression within a quiet moment.

I revisit the question 'does posting consistently compromise the

music?' Through everything I've experienced as an artist, I would say so

THE STAGE IS ALREADY IN YOUR HANDS: THE INDEPENDENT ARTIST'S DILEMMA by Nat Valdez Hernandez

Talented Costa Rican artist and multi-instrumentalist based in London examines how independent artists should navigate today's industry



Signing with a label in 2026 isn't the golden ticket it once was. Today, most labels want artists who already have a built-in audience and proven traction. That means the real path to getting noticed is to do the work yourself: build an audience and create enough



content to stand out as an independent artist. But that raises a bigger question: why get signed in 2026?

Like everything else in media and artistry, the music industry has shifted. Platforms like TikTok and

Instagram have created a new reality for artists willing to put themselves out there online. Years ago, the traditional route was to play gigs, hoping someone from a record label happened to be in the audience and liked your music enough to reach out. Today, musicians have a stage in their own hands. They can build an audience online, generate revenue through content, and eventually bring that audience into real life by selling tickets to their shows. At that point, an A&R representative might approach them, or they might choose to approach a record label themselves.

The main question is this: if you already have a growing audience and your artistry is standing out, should you get signed?

My short answer would be no. That said, there are still pros and cons. The biggest advantage is financial support. A label can provide access to better recording studios, experienced mixing and mastering engineers, marketing teams, and industry contacts that would otherwise take years to build.

However, authenticity has become one of the most valuable qualities an artist can have. Audiences are incredibly good at recognising what feels genuine, and many would rather hear music made in a home studio if it feels honest than

something overproduced that lacks personality. Besides, home studios today are more than capable of producing professional-quality music on a budget.

The same applies to marketing. If you already understand your audience, consistently create ideas that resonate with them, and your following continues to grow through your own strategies, you don't necessarily need a large team to run your campaigns. That doesn't mean you shouldn't ask for help. Building a small team of professionals who genuinely understand you, your music and your audience can often be valuable.

Then there are the downsides: long-term contracts, reduced revenue, legal obligations, and the possibility that your artistic vision no longer aligns with the expectations of the label... You get my point.

Whether your goal is getting signed or staying independent, you'll still have to start in the same place: social media.

Here are some reasons why social media is important for musicians: (LabelGrid. Feb 11, 2026)

Social Media Marketing for Musicians [2025 Guide]

Importance of Social Media for Musicians

- **Visibility and Reach:** Billions of users on platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter offer musicians immense exposure opportunities. These platforms can help you gain visibility and attract new fans across diverse demographics.
- **Direct Engagement:** Social media fosters direct connections between musicians and fans. You can share your journey, respond to comments, and create a community around your music. This engagement boosts fan loyalty and deepens their connection to your work.
- **Content Diversity:** You can showcase various content types, including music videos, live performances, behind-the-scenes glimpses, and personal stories. This variety keeps your audience engaged and invested in your artistic journey.
- **Brand Development:** Establishing a solid brand identity is crucial. Use social media to showcase your music and your personal style, values, and stories. This multifaceted approach strengthens your connection with your audience.
- **Engagement Growth:** Increasing engagement metrics, like likes, shares, and comments, can amplify your online presence. Focus on creating shareable content and initiating conversations that resonate with your target audience.
- **Fan Base Expansion:** Social media marketing supports your efforts to grow your fan base. Use targeted advertising and collaborations with other artists to reach new audiences and encourage them to explore your music.
- **Feedback and Adaptation:** Use social media as a tool for collecting feedback. Understand what resonates with your audience and adapt accordingly, improving your craft and content strategy based on their responses.

Most independent artists understand the importance of promoting their music online, but that is where they get it all wrong; they try to post every single day the same type of content because they want to focus almost exclusively on promoting the songs instead of promoting the art and artist behind them. Your personality is often what makes people stay.

One way of measuring whether your content has become repetitive or monotonous is by asking yourself: What if someone only followed me? Would they watch the whole video? Would they engage with it? Would they look up the

songs afterwards? Most importantly, after watching only your content for several days, would they still be interested?

Answering those questions honestly can be incredibly helpful. I've come across plenty of artists whose profiles feel repetitive. Every post looks the same, every caption says the same thing, and eventually, I scroll straight past because it no longer feels like they're excited about what they're creating, so why should I be excited about them?

Personally, I think lip-syncing to your own song with text over the video has become "easy" content, and it's probably the type of content I see most often from smaller artists. That doesn't mean it's wrong. There isn't really a right or wrong way to create content, only approaches that work better than others, depending on the artist. Some formats might perform well for someone else and not for you, and that's completely fine. Content creation is largely trial and error.

I don't criticise "easy" content because life gets busy. Some days, artists simply won't have the time or energy to create something more ambitious. I actually think everyone should have their own version of easy content that helps

them post consistently. The important thing is not getting stuck there. Variety is what keeps an audience interested and gives you different ways of communicating with them.

Finally, I want to touch on gig culture in London. Having performed at several venues myself, I've concluded that many gigs, particularly those aimed at emerging artists, are far less beneficial than they first appear.

I still think they're worth doing early in your career because they provide experience, performance practice, and valuable photos and videos for promotion. However, many follow the same model: you perform a 30-minute set, bring your own equipment, and your payment depends almost entirely on how many tickets you sell. If you don't sell the required minimum, your performance is cancelled.

The problem is obvious. Most new artists are forced to rely on friends, classmates and family to buy tickets, often around £10 each. Once travel costs are added, that's already a significant ask. Even if you manage to sell ten tickets, generating around £100, the venue might keep roughly 55% of the revenue. If you're splitting what's left between four musicians, everyone walks away with around

£14, which can easily disappear on travel expenses and half of the pint of Coke you bought at the venue.

Financially, these gigs rarely make sense. Exposure-wise, they can also be limited because you're mostly performing for people who already know you. It's the live equivalent of sending your latest song to the same group chat every time you release something new.

That's why I think social media should come first, with gigs supporting your online growth rather than replacing it. Use live performances to create content, strengthen and boost your presence online, and keep building your audience. Eventually, you'll have more options: signing with a small label, waiting for a larger opportunity, or staying independent, which is, personally, the route I'd recommend.

None of this is easy. Building a career as an artist means trying things that don't work, learning from them, and trying again. It means staying creative, open-minded and excited, even when things don't go to plan. More than anything, being an artist is about getting back on your feet every time something goes wrong and continuing to create anyway. Above all, it's about having fun,

embracing every attempt, and never giving up.

[10 Major Artists Who Went Independent And Why They Took the Leap](#)

[The 10 Biggest Independent Artists Of All Time \(Ranked For 2026\) | Promo Hype](#)

[How to Get Signed by a Record Label in 2025 | Melody Rights](#)

[Social Media Marketing for Musicians \[2025 Guide\]](#)

[Top 10 Record Labels Looking For Artists In 2026 \(Ranked\) | Promo Hype](#)

[Spotify's 2026 Loud & Clear update shows the growth in independent artists - RouteNote Blog](#)

THE VALUE OF MUTUAL SUPPORT by Neil

With all this deafening noise from self-elected influencers and so-called industry insiders posting their diatribes on TikTok, piling pressure on artists to put their mental health on the line to meet unsustainable levels of content creation, there is a simple subject that these people are always silent about. Namely artists supporting one another. Well of course they are silent about it. It doesn't fit their narrative and it might not earn them the likes and shares they rely on to monetise their irresponsible activities. After all, it takes them a couple of minutes to make yet another video on their iPhone demanding we all create four engaging audio-visual TikTok posts per day. It takes artists weeks and bands even longer. But they won't care about that because it's all about them, in case you hadn't worked out why they are so

determined to get you to listen to their 'advice'.

Yet they are silent on one of the best pieces of advice they could be giving out. It is advice I give out to my students on a regular basis. Namely, if artists make the effort to proactively support one another, post positively about others' new music releases, vote every weekend at the Fresh on the Net Listening Post and leave positive comments, join in message threads and be supportive to fellow artists, they will get that love back in spades. I see this especially on platforms like X (for all its horrors) and Bluesky all the time. Threads could be more useful if Meta could be bothered to make an effort to make it easier to create proper threads on. It also extends to giving one another support slots at gigs so everyone gets to play to new audiences, going along to

watch fellow artists and encouraging them to do the same etc. It is one of the ways in which artists can begin to build a solid foundation of genuine supporters around themselves.

This issue came to my attention again recently thanks to a conversation I saw involving two good friends of mine - Del Owusu (Fresh on the Net/Platinum Mind) and Tim Blackburn (Mistrust) - who were saying something similar. They were right to flag this. Artists are not being encouraged to support one another; at least not by the loudmouths on TikTok and not by the music industry itself. A cynic might ponder as to whether the industry would prefer to keep artists as isolated as possible from mutual support so that they are easier to exploit and manipulate.

As usual, it falls to those of us who are involved in supporting and promoting grassroots music to make these arguments and give out this kind of advice. It is hardly rocket science!

The frustrating aspect with this is how it undermines our attempts to build platforms that grassroots artists could benefit from if they all made a bit more effort. Fresh on the Net is a case in point. Even in the days when Tom Robinson was running it and linking it directly to

his BBC Introducing Mixtape Show on BBC Radio 6 Music, we might have got around 65 people to vote at the Listening Post in a good week. Currently, we do well to get more than 40. Yet, if every artist that sends music to the in-box each week came and voted, it would be hundreds, maybe even thousands. And that would mean the 25 tracks that were selected for the Listening Post would be getting greater exposure. Then we also have the Alt Picks which allow us to select another bunch of tracks that missed out on the Listening Post and write about them too. We do get encouraging readership levels for them but they could be a lot higher.

Then there are the radio shows broadcasting grassroots music - my Trust The Doc Radio Show, Del's Songbird Sessions, Michelle's Eat My Brunch and a host of others. We all have pretty good audiences compared to the average online show but what if, instead of around 650 listeners per week (about 150 live and 500 on the podcast later), I could have 6.500. You will hear a lot more exciting new music on my show than you will on any BBC Introducing show these days; at least if you are looking for something more substantial than identikit Pop, Hip Hop and EDM anyway! The aspect of presenting my live and interactive show I like

best is that there is such a lovely group of people that gathers on the X or Bluesky threads and keeps positive commentary going in addition to trying to guess my WhatsTheWord and vote in the polls. It is a mixture of grassroots music artists and fans but the level of mutual support and love is inspiring. We need to see that replicated on a hugely magnified scale. Why? Because when we do, everyone wins.

So next time your ears are being assaulted by TikTok 'influencers' telling you how you will never have a career unless you follow their 'advice', instead of giving them another 'like' to boost their algorithmic rating, why not instead make some time to go and join in some threads, post positively in response to others' music and generally immerse yourself in a loving mutually supportive community. It is a cliché but we are much stronger together than alone.

WHAT'S WITH THE DEWY-EYED NOSTALGIA?!! (by Neil)

I get that a lot of people involved in grassroots music have issues with how streaming, social media and the digital era have reconfigured the relationships between industry and artists. There are always ongoing battles for greater fairness and transparency. But what is with the latest spate of rose-tinted reinventing of the past by artists that I have been reading of late?

Do I need to remind people how much it used to cost for the most meagre amount of time in a bog standard recording studio, usually resulting in a disappointing demo? Do I need to remind people of how much it cost to release your own music and how impossible it was for unknown artists and labels to get distribution into record shops? Do I need to remind people about

the piles of rejection letters from labels and publishers as they punted their demos around the industry? Do I need to remind people about the technical limitations, time consumption and prohibitive costs of issuing mailouts ahead of gigs and how few people would turn up when we did? And do I need to remind people how hard it was to get played on the radio?

Hankering after some fantasy version of a glorious past is the most utterly pointless, not to mention disingenuous, waste of energy imaginable. The truth is that what we have in 2026 is infinitely preferable to what we had in 1996.

Now you can record an entire album to a professional standard

without leaving the house. Even, when recoding new tracks with my band, we can all record our parts remotely at no cost and send them electronically to one another. You can release music onto every digital platform worth being on for next to nothing. You can use free social media tools to market your music to a sizeable audience and you can also use them to invite people to come to gigs without the need for stationery, envelopes, stamps or photocopying behind the boss's back!

You can download recording, programming, mixing and mastering apps for free. Making edits of tracks has never been easier and you can even film enough footage for a decent video on an iPhone and edit it for free too. Then you can put it out on a YouTube channel. No more having to make expensive digital videos to send to MTV Networks, EMAP (The Box etc.), Chartshow TV (Flaunt etc.) or Channel U for them to ignore anyway. We are our own online music channels now.

You can make podcasts, video trailers, run online polls and surveys, spend modest amounts on google and social media ads etc. instead of paying a fortune for ineffectual half page ads in music papers. You can work with outlets that cost less than a tenth of what

we used to pay pluggers to pitch for suitable Spotify playlists that don't just deliver passive streams but engagement too (i.e. if we are on the right playlists, fans will save our tracks to personalised playlists and libraries and become repeat listeners). If we are smart about it, we can also use the analytics provided by Spotify to help us think about how we want to target potential fans.

We also have a load of independent, mostly online, radio shows we can get played on and there are far more music journals and blogs, most of which are free to read and we have a greater chance of bagging a review than we ever had in the days of the mighty music press. Moreover, we no longer face the risk of our one and only review in a major journal being a vicious piece of character assassination written by a smug middle class journalist who needs someone to take out his failure to get laid on!

There is an awful lot that is wrong with the industry and media (as if that is anything new!). While I am not going to indulge barking mad and ridiculous comparisons between being streamed by someone who has already paid a monthly subscription and a record sale, I do believe remuneration for streams is unfairly low and

weighted in favour of the Digital Service Providers. I do believe that cuts and changes to BBC broadcasting practice, perhaps fuelled by its takeover by the far right, has reduced opportunities for new talent to have worthwhile BBC Introducing support.

It worries me that labels still have the power to impose contractual clauses that undermine artists' mental health and well-being by turning them into brute-force content creators and AI poses a threat we all recognise but are still not sure how to deal with. I could go on and on with the list of what needs fixing. But then I could have done so thirty years ago too.

There is no question in my mind that the overall situation is markedly better for independent artists now than it has ever been. Of course, with that comes far more intense competition and noise to cut through. But I would much rather be able to make great sounding tracks and have them released and distributed worldwide

AND FINALLY

When people use clichés like 'It's been a roller coaster month', an understandable instinct may be to feel like replying 'Has it really?' in a tired, sarcastic tone! But June *has* been a bit of a roller coaster for us at Trust The Doc HQ!

than be stuck with my begging bowl trying to find a 'record deal' while spending over a month's wages making a mediocre demo that does no justice to the songs or the musicians playing them. Incidentally, I also much prefer the facility to use a laptop to give me more options and instrumental elements live instead of having to rely on musicians who are either not good enough or not committed enough and are going to drag the standard of performance down either way but still expect to be paid.

So, by all means call for all the problems to be fixed and keep up the battles to improve deals for artists. But that does not require you to pretend there was some glorious past where artists had a better deal and we were all doing much better than we are today. That is utterly false and is a gross reinvention of history. Time to take off those rose-tinted spectacles and deal with the present.

EBBW VALE

It started on a high with the release of our single ***Ebbw Vale*** to immediate critical acclaim although it was disappointing that BBC Introducing in Wales, who

have played other tracks by us, chose to stonewall us when we gave them a track that is actually placing a contemporary political issue in the context of Welsh Valeys history! But then are the BBC allowed to play anything that might offend Farage these days? Eventually it did get fantastic support (and a live on air interview) from Ebbw Vale's own community FM station BGFM Radio courtesy of the wonderful Chris and Jamie, proper supporters of grassroots music and not fairweather ones like so many in national and regional radio these days.

ARTS COUNCIL SHENANIGANS!!

We had an unusual situation with the Arts Council this month. Having complained about appalling and utterly confusing feedback on the rejection of a Research & Development Grant application, you could have knocked me (Neil) down with a feather when I received an email upholding my complaint and admitting they messed up! The Arts Council putting its hand up to failing to meet its own standards! A first in 7 years of being a regular applicant!

The joy was shortlived though when a week later, having asked another panel to consider it, they rejected it for a second time, once again with reasons that were, at best, weak

and, at worst, spurious. Knowing what we know about others who did receive funding from the same fund, it is a real shame that they would not give a mere £7,000 to a much-needed post-doctoral level research project that could have had a seriously positive impact on practices in the UK music industry with implications for grassroots. But why have a Research & Development grant fund if the panel set up to award it has no knowledge or understanding of research and cannot differentiate between widely differing levels of academic rigour?

In the meantime, we wait to hear about other grant applications we are involved with including the latest in a series of attempts to get funding for Fresh on the Net Live to happen again in 2026; also a project about tackling industry advice and logic on ethical marketing which they will probably reject because they will not understand it and will give feedback that makes no sense. We will be very happy to be proved wrong though!

Of course, the situation could be so much better if this Labour Government would find the money to reverse the hideous Tory cuts that Starmer and co were so vocally critical of but have so far done nothing about. Baroness

Hodge's report continues to gather dust in some Civil Servants' drawers while, in the meantime, the Labour manifesto commitment to a review of the Creative Industries and arts funding remains incomplete and unimplemented. A job for Andy Burnham's new Cabinet perhaps. Hmmm, well we won't hold our breath!

RACIST VISA DISGRACE !!!

One of the brightest pieces of news we received in June was that Sherry was successful in obtaining the authority to have the Global Talent visa; a ringing endorsement of everything she has achieved since coming to the UK in 2022. The trouble is, to switch from her current dependents' visa to the Global Talent one will cost yet more thousands of pounds which we do not know will be obtainable within the 3 month limit for applying.

This is because the UK Government is fleecing hard working migrants for thousands every year on top of all the tax and NIC they pay and their contributions to the NHS. It is scandalous that our country treats loyal hard working migrants so appallingly. Shame on the Labour Party for making the rules more racist and draconian even than the Tories were prepared to consider.

What has happened to our party and is it too late for it to be put right? Moreover, will Burnham and his new team have the political will to do so when there is so much ill-informed racist noise about immigration and Starmer, Streeter and co have pandered to it instead of challenging it?

Either way, change will not come quickly enough to avoid the scenario that currently confronts us and the desperately hard time Sherry faces in raising the money to be able to enjoy her huge achievement as a recognised global talent.

MAKERFIELD REJECTS RACISTS

After all the hype in the lead-up to the Makerfield By-Election with the BBC and right wing media doing their best to talk up the combined strength of the Reform UK and Restore Britain vote, Labour's Andy Burnham romped home with a majority of over 9,000 and even the total right wing vote didn't come close as he took 55% on a high turnout.

Right up until the result was announced, which happened just after 3AM, the BBC brown nosers had tried to claim that the high turnout could benefit Reform UK. Utter nonsense. A low turnout would be much more likely to help the extremists because then their

rump of supporters would wield more influence. A high turnout was bound to favour Burnham and so it proved to be.

It was the second high profile by-election in a short space of time where the media had exaggerated how well Farage and his thugs were doing in the polls. In Gorton & Denton, it was the Greens who won comfortably. This time it was Labour. Shame on the BBC's insidious little team of right wing elitists led by Laura Kuennsburg and Chris Mason for their continued platforming of Farage and the far right. They make a mockery of the role of a license fee funded public service broadcaster.

Well done to the people of Makerfield for showing racism the red card. Let's hope this proves to be a real turning point. Grassroots musicians and those in their support networks can sleep a little easier with the hope that Reform UK will never get to form a government and stick their Nazi jackboots into arts funding and support for our creative industries which, despite being among the best on the planet, Farage sees no value in. Much like his former Brexit buddy Boris Johnson whose decision to slash arts funding in half continues to cause so many problems for our sector.

The right always portray themselves as masters of efficient economics. Yet they clearly don't understand the simple relationship between investment in creative projects that build platforms, nurture talent and create jobs, skills and opportunities and consequent growth. Mind you, they were also the architects of Brexit and that has been an unmitigated disaster. Odd thow this is swept under the carpet when the media are echoing Farage's propaganda!

LIVE MUSIC'S ONGOING CRISIS

The big corporate live music companies like Live Nation, AEG and SJM may be thriving with record ticket sales on the global stage. But, at the level of UK grassroots gigs, the picture still looks bleak. In June, we have seen a number of social media posts and threads involving friends who put on live events around different regions of the UK and they are all reporting the same problems of falling ticket sales and attendances at grassroots gigs.

The cost of living crisis and hike in energy bills hit the sector hard in 2023 after there had been an initial post-COVID boom as people enjoyed being allowed to meet again. Now the despicable conduct of Trump, Netanyahu and their mates has meant rocketing fuel

prices which have hit so many people in the pocket.

We saw the trend taking place when we were still putting monthly gigs on at the Fox & Firkin, AMP Studios and The Amersham Arms. People were leaving it until the 11th hour to buy tickets and numbers were dropping despite us keeping our prices low and affordable.

The situation continued with our recent Brilliant Brent project in Kilburn and we relied heavily on the ICMP student audience there. Now, as we gear up for gigs as part of the Portsmouth Hub, it will be interesting to see whether there can be sufficient support for the artists who have been selected as the cohort there.

The Music Venue Trust has been working hard to support grassroots venues and promoters but again this is an area where greater availability of grant funding could really help to reinvigorate the live sector. In the meantime, our hearts go out to all those dedicated promoters of grassroots live music. Let's hope things get better soon.

NEW MUSIC NEVER SLEEPS !!!

On a brighter note, June has been another month of great music coming at us from different directions including the Fresh on the Net in-box, the army of

plugging and PR companies sending tracks to our radio show and this journal plus artists and their managers or labels. 61 new releases reviewed in Part 2 of this edition.

Once again, we would like to strongly encourage you to make the small sacrifice of voting in the Fresh On The Net Listening Post every weekend. Have your say in which 10 tracks get reviewed. You can also read and comment on the reviews which are usually up by Monday lunchtime. The more people who come and support the platform, the more we can do to provide meaningful exposure for grassroots talent and demand that the likes of BBC Introducing take notice. At the moment, a lot more people read the reviews, including our Alt Picks feature, than vote at the Listening Post. An increase in voters would visibly demonstrate the strength of support for grassroots artists.

For our own band, we are excited to work with Jade Perry and Memphis Music on our next single campaign. ***Shimmer*** is another song where the lyrics make clear our anti-fascist, anti-hate stance. We are also trying to put a little tour together for November and hope to have news on that soon.

So we will end by saying a big big thank you to all of you who read this journal/blog. We really appreciate you doing so and hope we are able to provide a decent balance of news, reviews and articles. We always love having guest contributors and having two this month who are Neil's current students has been very special.

NEIL & SHERRY xxxx

Take care everyone and have a great month ahead. As we always say 'New Music Never Sleeps'!

