

MUSIC

with Helen Clarke



I Was A Cub Scout
I Want You To Know That
There Is Always Hope
Album
(Abeano)
February 11
★★★★☆

I WAS A CUB SCOUT release an epic debut which proves that what they lack in band members, they more than make up for in sound.

Armed with a guitar, drumkit and synth, the Nottingham duo make a noise that could fill arenas. But is that enough? In a scene saturated by boy-fronted guitar bands, their identikit indie pop sound risks getting lost among the masses.

They cite Jimmy Eat World as an influence, and have a similar upbeat, emo sentiment. But limited numbers force them to dig deeper. The result, while repetitive, is a fantastic debut.

Packed with mood songs with bucketloads of atmosphere, it's one to play in the dark. Synth-fuelled twinkling starscape backings inject their music with a Delays-style air of mystery. Fans' favourite *Pink Square* stands out with *Save Your Wishes* – both strong, chorus-led singles.

Luscious, indulgent tracks to light up this summer's festivals.



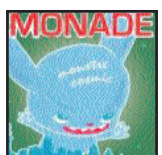
Kid Harpoon
The Second EP
EP
(Young Turks)
February 18
★★★★☆

THE FOLLOW-UP to last year's *The First EP* catapults Tom Hull into a league of his own. Defying genre, he's a bit folk, country and rock, tackling trad pop themes with added venom.

In *Riverside* you feel tears of frustration as he snarls through a track which sounds like a Mid West classic.

Startlingly personal, *Fathers And Sons* and *Suicide Grandad* go to the core, razor-edged guitar battling frantic vocal. It's when his voice almost loses control, exposing a vulnerable side, that we're granted full access to his world. "Moments of memory are fading from view, I'm through with my sickening images of you."

Her Body Sways offers momentary light relief. A fantastic EP, full of heart and passion. Time will tell if he can spread it out over a full-length album.



Monade
Monstre Cosmic
Album
(Too Pure)
February 18
★★★★☆

STEREOLAB singer Laetitia Sadier releases her third LP with 'other band' Monade. Veering from Stereolab's indie roots, Monade's soul is firmly in French lounge pop. It's electro to the core; its simple beats, driving keyboard and disaffected, monotone vocals have a feel of Electrelane.

A vast sound, *Monstre Cosmic* is a journey through time and space with Sadier's vocals filling the void. Fantasy clashes with reality as her lonely vocal brings the fusion of running strings and electro clatter back to earth.

Highlight is *Regarde*, a jaunty track propped up with stomping trumpets and cutting guitar. Despite being part-French, part-English, the album runs as a whole. Sadier describes the albums as a river, and it flows well. However, by album number three you'd expect at least a couple of stand-out tracks worthy of being singles.

Beautiful background music, but lacking a bit of essential backbone.

CONDUCT YOURSELF PROPERLY

BBC YOUNG Musician of the Year, two solo albums (and a third on the way) plus a stint with the London Symphony Orchestra. Not bad for a 20-year-old. It's the story of violin prodigy Nicola Benedetti, who graces the stage of Cadogan Hall on Monday, February 25. She picked up the violin at the age of four, following in the footsteps of her eight-year-old sister Stephanie. "I was just along for the ride!" she says. "We're not from a musical background, but I was pleased it came so naturally to me."

Her extreme talent saw her accepted into the Yehudi Menuhin School in Surrey – one of the top British schools for young musicians – at the age of 10.

Five hours practice a day might sound like a nightmare, but Nicola says:

"It's still a passion. It never feels like a chore. I see music as an expression of our experience in life."

Scottish-born and now living in Chiswick, she explains how the way a piece of music is interpreted is a shared decision between soloist and conductor.

In this case Nicola will be steering the music with Estonian Kristjan Järvi, 36, of the Tonkünstler Orchestra. Celebrating its 101st birthday this year, the Austrian orchestra is renowned for attracting younger audiences with its daring programmes.

"Kristjan is very relaxing to play with. He's young, he's confident and not afraid to take risks," Nicola says. Together, they will wind through Brahms, Bruch and

Sibelius on the night. Highlighting Bruch's Violin Concerto No 1, she says: "It's a very dramatic, romantic piece, which I will try and let speak for itself. I'm not dictatorial in the way I play, the emotions are expressed in a way anyone can interpret."

Nicola also dedicates part of her week to the CLIC Sargent practice-a-thon. It encourages young musicians to find sponsorship for their practice sessions, raising money for children with cancer.

With so many accomplishments under her belt it comes as no surprise to hear Nicola say: "I'm not even a quarter of the way to where I want to be. I'll be working and slaving on this journey for the rest of my life."



VIOLIN
PRODIGY
NICOLA
BENEDETTI AND
CONDUCTOR
KRISTJAN JÄRVI
PREPARE FOR
CADOGAN
HALL.
CHRISTIAN
McLAUGHLIN
REPORTS
FROM THE
PODIUM

**BATON
ROUND:
Conductor
Kristjan Järvi,
36, will be in
charge at
Cadogan Hall**

● Nicola Benedetti perform Brahms' Hungarian Dances 6 and 10, Bruch's Violin Concerto No 1 and Sibelius Symphony No 2 with the Tonkünstler Orchestra on February 25 at Cadogan Hall, Sloane Terrace, SW1. £18-39. 7.30pm. Call 020 7730 4500. See www.cadoganhall.com

SUBDUED PLEASURE AT FOUNTAINS GIG

REVIEW

THE PALE FOUNTAINS
SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE

THERE was no web lottery, and no international scramble for tickets to see the Pale Fountains' reunion, and the Shepherd's Bush Empire shares little as a gig venue with the pop theme park that is the Millennium Dome.

But to those present, most of whom were old enough to have memories of the early 80s 'quiet' movement, this was an unmissable evening of nostalgia.

The Pale Fountains were the first incarnation of the Liverpool band, Shack, who recently released a must-buy best-of compilation.

Despite limited commercial success, the band's albums, including *Pacific Street* and *From Across the Kitchen Table*, won them real acclaim.

They had played a hometown show the previous night and were clearly rattled by the more reserved west London audience, lead singer Michael Head complaining: "They really got into it last night, you can hear a pin drop in 'ere."

Subdued but profound appreciation was in keeping with the retrospective 'quiet' theme of the evening, as near-middle-aged types showed their elation by moodily shuffling to the swirling indie sounds.

While Head's banter was clumsy, he is a genuine talent in songwriting, and the rich melodies stood up to the test of being 25 years old.

A gathering of Scouse glitterati that included Ian Broudie, who produced

some Fountains material in the 80s, as well as The Coral and actor Ian Hart, had followed them south.

A powerful performance by one-man brass section Andy Diagram, the former James trumpet maverick, added another dimension as the band's momentum. Diagram, in CND T-shirt, very much in tune with the Pale Fountains' day, at times upstaged his fellow musicians as his expansive ability shone through.

Head wound up the show with an acoustic encore that included some of Shack's more unit-shifting-friendly tracks from late-90s album *HMS Fable*, which pleased the over-lubricated perpetual hecklers.

But as an event this was all about reviving a much-loved, under-appreciated band that remain close to the hearts of those fortunate enough to have discovered them. **William Dean**

A DIFFERENT TENSION



BRICKING IT: Bruce Kissell relaxes ahead of Monday night's gig at Power's

PREVIEW

BRUCE KISSELL
POWER'S ACOUSTIC ROOM, KILBURN
MONDAY

BRUCE Kissell's career began as a bundle of nerves in the queue at a Bristol folkhouse four years ago.

"It felt like a school register," he says of his first open-mic night. "Everyone's really nervous, because nobody has really done it before."

He played his song *7 Second Memory*, one of the first he had written, and after his set knew he had found his calling.

Kissell, 26, hopes to continue to woo audiences on Monday at Power's Acoustic Room in Kilburn.

While he sometimes plays with the support of a violin and bass, the stage will belong solely to him and his hypnotic folk music.

"I've always had an interest in music," Bruce says of his 15 years as a musician.

"I was brought up with classical music, but I've branched more into a band mentality and folk and acoustic music."

He studied English literature at university, which fuelled his interest in the idea of the song as a poem.

"When I was doing English lit, I liked TS Eliot, who talked about communicating before being understood," he says.

"I also strive to not be too obvious, conjuring an atmosphere and leaving the rest to the listener's imagination."

Notting Hill-based Kissell draws his inspiration from bands such as Sufjan Stevens and Iron and Wine, as well as from his experiences working with mental health patients.

"In my volunteering and my songs, there's a tension followed by relief," he says. "Whether it's talking or singing, I want to ease people's tension any way I can."

● Bruce Kissell will be performing at Power's Acoustic Room, 332 Kilburn High Road this Monday (February 18). Stanton Delaplane and Hotplate also perform. £3. 7pm. Call 020 7372 4593.

Pam Cohen

Music aside, a very good show

BEGUN as a radio play, Bernie Gaughan's musical *Next Door's Baby* certainly does not disappoint acting-wise, but perhaps should have cut the music out altogether.

The show focuses on the impoverished O'Briens and the slightly posh Hennessys.

A feud has sprouted between the neighbours, and when the newspaper hosts a bonny baby contest, each family rushes to enter their newborn.

As the competition progresses, cracks appear in the O'Brien family, threatening to completely tear it apart. Although Mrs O'Brien (Louise Gold) shines at the beginning of the musical, it is Riona O'Connor as the eldest O'Brien daughter, Orla, who steals the show.

Psychologically beaten into submission by her mother, Orla has to deal with the repercussions of a not-so-innocent past. O'Connor brilliantly captures her helplessness and the pain within

her song *Hello Me* is arguably the best moment of the show.

The passionate rows between Gold and O'Connor make the air around the stage sizzle with emotion, and the ease with which the actors relate to each other feels very familiar. Stephen



Carlile as Dickie O'Brien and Emily Sills as Miriam Hennessy are delightful to listen to and watch.

Although staged and acted very well, the show lacks substantial musical content.

Few of the songs are sung by more than two

characters, and lack the vocal interactions that make musicals so pleasant to listen to.

Although sung well by the cast, the score is sadly forgettable.

Next Door's Baby paints a funny yet emotional picture, but maybe next time Gaughan should stick to her powerful scripts.

● *Next Door's Baby* runs at the Orange Tree Theatre, opposite Richmond tube station, until March 8. £8-18. Shows at 7.45pm daily, Saturday matinee, 4pm. Call 020 8940 3633. See www.orangetree-theatre.co.uk.

Pam Cohen

BABE: Riona O'Connor steals the show as the eldest daughter, Orla, in the Orange Tree's *Next Door's Baby*