

BRIGHT SPELLS

PREVIEW

CONOR OBERST
AUGUST 27
ELECTRIC BALLROOM

EYEBROWS were raised when Oberst's eponymous album was released earlier this year. His first solo effort since 1993's *Water*, the figurehead of US indie seemed to rip off his crown and stamp on it – a mid-career crisis, if you like.

He ditched his Bright Eyes moniker and embraced the Dylan comparisons that have been heaped on him over the years.

An Americana, folk-rock take on his brand of introspective, anecdotal tales, it saw him attempt to break away from a reputation forged over more than 15 years in the biz.

And the shift has affected more than just his sound. Tonight he looks different too – more rough and ready, with shaggy hair and a checked shirt, and a backing band straight out of Woodstock.

"We are sick," he announces, explaining a gravelly cough that plagues him throughout the show, giving his Mystic Valley Band chance to step up to the mic.

Aside from that, the erratic ramblings that made him both lovable and loathable as Bright Eyes are notably absent, but the largely male audience still hang on his every word.

At just 28, his unrivalled ability to cap-



PATCHY: Conor Oberst finally burst into life during the encore

Picture by Matt Grayson

ture the psyche of American middle class youth has been the source of the Dylan comparisons, and the Dylan-esque *Get Well Cards* is his showcase. "Right there, that's the postman sleeping in the sand," he growls, his guitar poised above his head.

He sneaks off stage about five songs before the end, leaving his band to it. One song in and the crowd are getting itchy, shouting for Oberst, but the collected beards and denim burst into a cover of Harry

Nilsson's *Everybody's Talkin'*. He joins them half way through, beer bottle and vodka in hand, for a bizarre pub-style sing-along.

Visibly hyped up, he steps up his game for the extended encore. Launching himself from amps and careering around the stage, he injects new life into the cringingly country-by-numbers *I Don't Wanna Die In The Hospital*.

He's at his introspective best with *Milk*

Thistle – an achingly lonely, delicate song that silences the room, from front barrier to bar queue. But this interlude is short lived, and new single *Souled Out!*, goes down a storm, as does his take on blues standard *Corrine Corrina*, famously covered by Dylan.

A patchy gig – the new album's fillers drag him down but when he's stripped back, with just an acoustic guitar for support, there's something really quite special there.

Helen Clarke

MIXING IT UP AFTER DARK

PREVIEW

ART AFTER DARK
LOUISE T BLOUIN INSTITUTE
THURSDAY

FUSION cuisine anyone? Mixing flavours in food is long established, but what about in the arts? Theatre; installation; painting – mixed media seems to be today's catchphrase.

Yet some, like Paula Naughton and Greg Poole, have been doing it for years. Paula is an artist, Greg is a DJ, and it's now nine years they have been throwing parties that blend their disciplines.

Known as *Stomper*, their residencies have taken them from New York to Dublin and London. "The Louise T Blouin Institute (Ladbroke Grove's hidden-gem art gallery) heard about what we did and approached us to host one of their Art After Dark nights,"

Greg says. Art After Dark is a summer-long event where every Thursday evening a different visionary artist or group is asked to take over the gallery. This Thursday is the last of the season, and thanks to the presence of the mighty Don Letts, it's likely to be the best. Letts is known for his lifelong

passion for music and film making, having famously introduced reggae to the punk scene in the late 70s through his residency at The Roxy.

At the time he hung out and documented the rise of bands like The Clash and has since won a Grammy award after re-cutting the footage into the 2000 film, *Westway to the World*.

Letts will be screening parts of *Westway* as well as other more obscure films, giving an informal talk, and laying down his DJ set from 9-10pm.

"The art will be happening all around with live sculpture, video and performances," Paula says. Photography and video will be supplied by Photographers' Gallery favourite Jesus Jimenes; light sculptures; beats will also come from Nintendo-hacker Paul B Davis – don't miss out, this will be a blend to please all palates.

Christian McLaughlin
● The final Art After Dark, *Twilight Suite*, is at the Louise T Blouin Institute, 3 Olaf St, on Thursday, September 11. Free. 6-11pm. Call 020 7985 9600. See www.twilightsuite.com
● To see one of Jesus Jimenes' videos head to www.londoninformer.co.uk in the Pics and Videos section.



SCREENING:
Legendary
film maker
Don Letts