

soundcheck

Issue 29 | Dec 2023/Jan 2024 DOUBLE ISSUE | FREE

Reading's FREE live music guide



**TAPE
IT SHUT**

December/January
Double issue

PEJ



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Sound-check #29

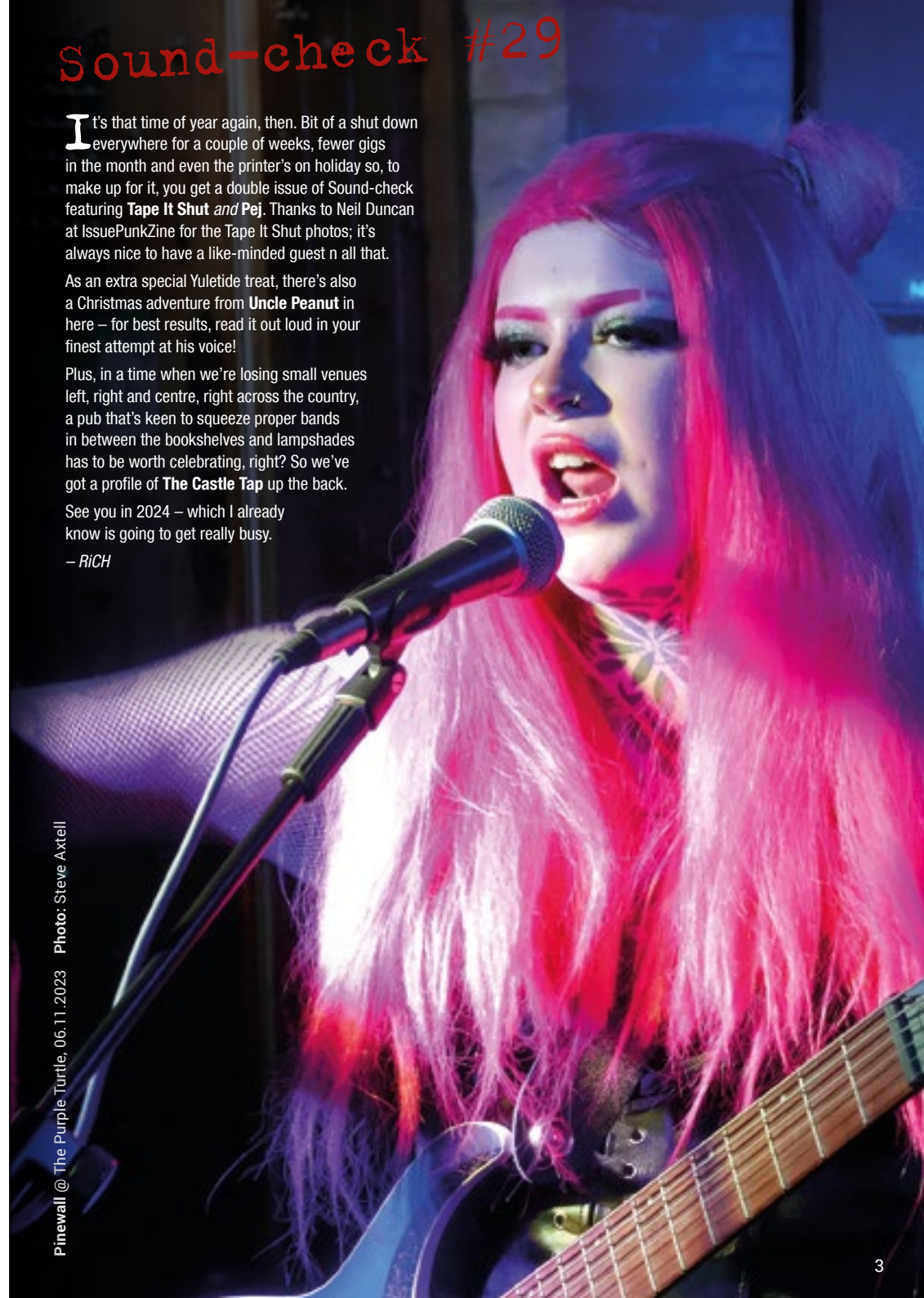
It's that time of year again, then. Bit of a shut down everywhere for a couple of weeks, fewer gigs in the month and even the printer's on holiday so, to make up for it, you get a double issue of Sound-check featuring **Tape It Shut** and **Pej**. Thanks to Neil Duncan at IssuePunkZine for the Tape It Shut photos; it's always nice to have a like-minded guest n all that.

As an extra special Yuletide treat, there's also a Christmas adventure from **Uncle Peanut** in here – for best results, read it out loud in your finest attempt at his voice!

Plus, in a time when we're losing small venues left, right and centre, right across the country, a pub that's keen to squeeze proper bands in between the bookshelves and lampshades has to be worth celebrating, right? So we've got a profile of **The Castle Tap** up the back.

See you in 2024 – which I already know is going to get really busy.

– RICH



Pinewall @ The Purple Turtle, 06.11.2023 Photo: Steve Axtell

TAPE IT SHUT

Punk music out to change the world with politics and non-binary love



When a band says that they produce their best material when they're angry you know it's going to be a fun interview. Especially when they start their gigs with the line "We're an inclusive political punk band. Welcome ladies and gentlemen and non-binary people just like me."

That's Tape It Shut. Three humans with a social conscience and political fire in their hearts who turn it all into great loud music. They've been storming around for the last few months, playing dozens of gigs in Reading and other places, really making a name for themselves. And there's another gig coming up soon at the Face Bar. But I met up with them at the site of one of their favourite sets this year – the Castle Tap.

This is where their performance year started back in January with a top night. It's only a small pub but it was packed out with punters desperate for a night of raucous noisy punk, after their Christmas turkey and two months of nonstop Mariah Carey.

The guys didn't know what to expect. Kane says they were thinking "OK, let's see what 2023 holds and oh, we got a gig in January and you have this thing in your mind that you're gonna be playing seven people, the dog and that's it."

But the crowd was ready for it and stepped up to the challenge. "It was ***** mental cause it was absolutely rammed and it was like this dark, dreary January evening."

Dan adds "Yeah, it's post-Christmas, nobody's got any money. No one's gonna come out and see bands. It was mad to see a mosh pit in the Castle Tap in this tiny space."

Then Kane says their big memory of the night was seeing one of their best friends get concussed on a pole: "My Dad essentially barged into him and he smashed his head!"

Tape It Shut is Dan Tape on vox and guitar, Andrew on drums, and Kane on bass and backing vocals with a voice that sounds a lot like Tom Hardy – if Tom Hardy was in a punk band (now that's something I'd like to see). Together they've had a wild year, made lots of friends and shared lineups, but they seem genuinely humbled by the experience.

Dan says "The Reading music scene, it's lovely for that. There's so many friends locally, from Missing The Scene, Launch Control and Landlord Lynch. And even the more indie bands like Kian

from The Amazing Tiger Band and Strangers in Transit. There's just so many lovely people that come out and see us and play with us." And that's just a few of the fantastic bands they've played with this year.

Dan is so into it they even ran their own all-day event, Stormfest, a collab with Jim from Missing the Scene. It was mainly a bunch of punk bands of course, split across both rooms of The Butler. Dan says "I think we raised over seven hundred pounds for mental health charities. It was very much cobbled together, done on mates and favours as cheap as we possibly could. People just turned up for it. And that was just wonderful to see. And I think that was one of the best sets we've played this year."

The band might feel all warm and fuzzy about playing so many gigs and the mates they've made doing it, but their music comes from somewhere entirely different. A much more militant, angry place like good punk should. And they aren't shy about their politics and how it drives them to keep writing.

Dan says "I think we're all sick and tired of certain things we're exposed to on the news, when we think this is just abhorrent and we get angry about it and channel that into music." More recently they're finding there's an audience for the political message which perhaps is why they've had such a good year. "People are sick and tired of it and want change."



Words: David Conquest

Pictures: Neil Duncan @ssupunkzine



The others strongly agree. Kane says "I've had years of being underneath a Conservative government and these things that you're promised when you're younger, of social housing, a right to education, you're slowly seeing that get stripped away."

It's personal too, they have a younger brother, and the anger now starts to get real. "He's ten years younger than me and he is being failed, not only by the education system but by the government. He's registered disabled and he gets just thrown to the side like a broken ***** toy. He's seventeen. He's a ***** kid. If you're not angry at that you're ***** stupid or you just lack empathy."

Andrew gets riled too about the inequality he sees between the rich and everyone else. "They don't deserve it, you can't justify that chasm. What you have to earn to live even relatively comfortably is ridiculous."

Dan brings it together, saying that getting these messages out through music and art is even more important now because less people watch the television news. Bringing these issues up on stage has encouraged more people to come up to them after shows to talk about their own issues.

That goes for their inclusive, non-binary opening line too. All the recent stories from the mainstream media and politicians about trans people, in the worst possible, dog-whistle way, have made Dan and Kane even more determined.

Now of course, Dan wants to write more songs bringing in the queer standpoint of the band. One is about when Kane really got punched for standing up for imaginary drag queens. The other, a "love-letter" to all the queer punk bands they found when they were growing up that had such an influence. Bands like OnSind, Dream Nails, The Menstrual Cramps, G.L.O.S.S. and more recently Breakup Haircut (for all you kids out there in need of some queer love and support).

Getting back to the music, all these problems in the world have made for a very productive year. Despite all the time on the road, the guys have been able to get some new songs down on paper. There are even plans for an album.

Dan says it's been an ongoing process of writing and performing that has worked well for them. "It's been really nice that we can write things and then slot them into the set and go, hey, I'm gonna battle test this. So, then I know that it's good for when we put the album out or, if it doesn't go down exactly to plan and then we go OK, we need to practise this more and make it tight so people actually enjoy it."

There's a story behind this record that Dan has been planning for a while. "There are some bands that have done it and the execution is


not normally there. But I've always wanted to do a concept record and I had an idea about five years ago for it. I want to do all of the songs in chronological order throughout a day. So, you have a day of somebody getting on the train, going to work, doing their general work, getting lunch, going back to work, seeing all that and then maybe going home eating dinner.

"And as mundane as that is, you base songs off of the points of interaction that you have throughout that day, so the first song on the record is 'Commutiny' which is about an altercation I had once. We do a spoken word piece at the start of the set where I trip up a man who's about to get on the train cause he's cut in line and tries to get a seat before everyone else and then the whole song is based off that."

The second song follows on from that, about the effect of the Grenfell Tower disaster as seen by Dan from their train seat. The third song is then about the narratives pushed by newspapers that are handed out by immigrants, attacking the people handing out the papers. Another song is about Andrew's experiences of mental health issues and lack of support at work.

Dan sums it all up. "You build up the entire album from niche little interactions, off into bigger political and social subjects. Which I think is a cool idea for a record. We'll have to see what the reception is. Like all things like this, you worry will people get it? But, it's been a fun process trying to slot everything in and trying to create that arc. Yeah, we're now two from the end and it feels pretty good."

Give some love to Tape It Shut at The Face Bar on 20th January. ■

 @tapeitshut



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OXFAM MUSIC SHOP

The Stranglers

Greatest Hits 1977-1990

They were summed them perfectly by Bob Stanley in his classic survey of pop history Yeah, Yeah Yeah: they looked like the kind of people who would hold up a petrol station on the way home from playing Top Of The Pops!



The Pixies

Doolittle

Just look at that! The most important rock record of the 1990s was released before they even started, in 1989. A unique greasy alchemy conjured by four David Lynchs of rock. Cinematic, claustrophobic, abrasive, melodic, retro -futuristic, profane puritanism.



The Kinks

Something Else by the Kinks

We got in a lovely collection of Kinks vinyl. I was once driving over Waterloo bridge at sunset and that song came on the radio at the precise moment a vista of river and city was revealed, illuminated by pink and yellow light.



Nina Simone

Baltimore

We also have a great collection of Nina Simone LPs. This is one of her latter works, a collaboration with prog jazzer Dave Matthews for CTI including a wonderful version of The Randy Newman title track...



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OXFAM MUSIC

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This is Pej. They have a new single just out so we went along to the launch gig at the Oakford Social Club to grab them for half an hour and ask them about it, them and anything else they want to tell us. It was bloody freezing outside and seven quid a pint inside but it was all worth it...

For those who don't know, Pej are made of Callum Young, Harry Sullivan, Alex Bacon and Simon Oliver – the man who is rapidly developing a Clem Cattini-esque ability to be in every band everywhere, all at once. Honestly, he's been at more Sound-check interviews than I have!

Ask them what they're into, that got them wanting to make music and pulled them together and you get quite a list: Black Midi's 'Schlagenheim', Shellac, Neil Young, Battles' 'Mirrored', Bowie's 'Ziggy Stardust'... actually a big spoonful of Bowie, all round. For Callum, especially, hearing Bowie's 'The Next Day' album when he was 15 turned out to be big deal.

"I bought it for my Dad, cos he loves Bowie. I heard that and I was absolutely in awe of his writing and absolutely in awe of how he presented himself on that album, and the different sounds that he pulled out on that album, seemingly from nowhere. And that has single-handedly influenced me for every single song I've written for this band."

Having said that, the song-writing is very much a team game with this lot. Sometimes there's a lyric and a plan that gets jammed around but also *"the opposite happens, too. We jam together and then one of us will take that jam away and build bits of that into a structure."*

So, does that mean they record what they're doing just in case it's good, then? It turns out, very much 'Yes'. Harry records *everything!*

"I've got, like, 30GB of audio recordings of every single practice that I've ever done. Not just Pej but mine and Callum's old band from 2016."

Crikey!

Talking of recording, then, what about the single? It's called '100 Years Of Solitude' and it's actually one of the first songs they wrote together, at all.

"We went down to Lonesome Dog Studios and recorded it with Spencer Withey. He recorded us way back in 2019, just set up in a room at Pirate and it was nice having a whole studio this time."

They got everything down, there, but initially did everything digitally. Afterwards, they've taken it all into the studio at Cemetery Junction and *"re-amped everything"*.

[At this point, everybody here wants a 'big shout out' to Claude at what is, most recently, called StudioCafe at Cemetery Junction. You can tell how long anybody has been in Reading by how they refer to that place – it has been there for ever and, in its latest guise with Claude in the chair, we all want it back!]

The end result of the studio time in East Reading is *"disgusting"* – in a good way – and full of the happy accidents that only real recording can provide, including some messing about with a fan! After all the analogue refining and back to Pirate for Simon in an 8-hour mixing session, it all went back to Spencer for mastering.

Simon: *"He knew how everything had been from the start and then he heard what I'd done to it and just 'made it louder'. Having him at the start and finish the process just, kind of, completed it."*

There's a lot of time, effort, evolution and care gone into this and it shows when you listen to it. Plus, that same massive workload got more tracks out so there's potentially an ep on its way in the near future. Keep your eyes peeled.

Live shows are a different story. One guy in the audience at one show described it simply as 'an assault on his ears' and they're all agreed that, after the nightmare of the pandemic times *"playing live is the best bit"*. It's a whole mess of modulators, noise boxes, Callum battling a guitar into submission and all never the same twice. You can see for yourself at the Turtle on 18th December.

In the meantime, '100 Years Of Solitude', all seven glorious, dirty, unnerving, Diamond Dogs-y minutes of it, with artwork by Alex Sheehan, is out there in the world now so you can get on it.

Oh... and if, like me, you can't help wondering what the hell a Pej is, it's an unseen character from Peep Show; referred to but never seen. So now you know.

See you on the 18th. ■

@pejband

Alex Sheehan: @artandantidepressants



gigguide

FRI 1 DEC

CULTUREMIX ARTS Reading Reggae Collective

£7.50 | 8pm
eventbrite.co.uk

CASTLE TAP Larkham & Hall

Free | 8pm | 18+

THE RETREAT Jive Alive

Free | 8:30pm

SAT 2 DEC

SOUTH STREET High Vibes and South St Afterschool Teatime + Lingua della Strega + Dom James

£7 | 8pm |
whatsonreading.com

THE OAKFORD Empires, Empires + Kipper Gillespie

Free | 8pm(probably) | 18+

THE BUTLER The Outcast Band

Free | 9pm | 18+

SUN 3 DEC

SUB89 Eric Paslay

£16.25 | 7pm
14+ (U16 w/adult)
premier.ticketek.co.uk

WATLINGTON HOUSE Readingfolk

Craig Joiner
£8otd | 8pm

MON 4 DEC

PURPLE TURTLE Groove Cult Shindigs Damaged by Circus Elephants + Kill Committee

£Free | 7:30pm | 18+

THU 7 DEC

SOUTH STREET James Yorkston & Nina Persson

£20 | 8pm
whatsonreading.com

THE BUTLER FSJB present Fusion 6

£6adv £8otd | 8pm
wegottickets.com

FRI 8 DEC

FACEBAR Club Velocity Christmas Knees Up John Otway & his Band + Damien A.

**Passmore &
the Loveable
Fraudsters**

£16.50 | 8pm
14+(U16 w/adult)
wegottickets.com

SOUTH STREET The Furrow Collective

£20 | 8pm
whatsonreading.com

THE FLOWING SPRING Xander and the Peace Pirates

£10/£12 | 8pm
theflowingspringpub.co.uk

SAT 9 DEC

CASTLE TAP Rocket Kings

£donations | 8pm

FACEBAR Stogfest promotions Straighten Out + Caz & The Traitors

£13.10 | 7:30pm |
tickettailor.com

THE RETREAT The Big River Blues Band

Free | 8:30pm

SUN 10 DEC

WATLINGTON HOUSE Jim Causley 'A Causley Christmas'

£8otd | 8pm

MON 11 DEC

PURPLE TURTLE Groove Cult Shindigs Juliette + Skoria

£Free | 7:30pm | 18+

WED 13 DEC

SUB89 Bad Manners + Max Splodge

£27.50 | 7:30pm
seetickets.com

To list your gig here, for
free, just email all the info to
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Info is correct at time
of going to press.
(At least, I've tried very hard.)

Websites refer to where
to get tickets.

bf = booking fee
otd = on the door
adv = advance
tbc = to be confirmed

THURS 14 DEC

SOUTH STREET Empires, Empires + English Garden + The Cloud Physics Experiment

£8.50, SU£6.50 | 7:30pm
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local artists live-sketching,
performances, and visual
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FRI 15 DEC

CASTLE TAP WolfNote

Free | 8pm
Folk-ish multi-instrumental
skills and vocal harmonies,
running the gamut from
upbeat to melancholy.

RISING SUN ARTS CENTRE Grant Sharkey and friends

£5adv(+bf), £8otd | 7pm
wegottickets.com

SAT 16 DEC

THE RETREAT The Go Go Five

Free | 8:30

If your gig's not here, it's probably because you didn't tell us about it:
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FACE BAR

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SUN 17 DEC

THE RETREAT Simon Price & guests

Free | 3pm
A seasonal one – Simon Price and his guests will be delivering jazz arrangements of Christmas carols arranged by Peter Billington

WATLINGTON HOUSE Readifolk Christmas Party

£3otd | 8pm

MON 18 DEC

PURPLE TURTLE Groove Cult Shindigs Black Foxxes + Pej + Screaming In A Public Toilet

£Free | 7:30pm | 18+

WED 20 DEC

THE LYNDHURST Jazz Singers' Night 10th Birthday and Christmas Celebration!

Free | 8pm
Come and sing with a live Jazz Band!

FRI 22 DEC

PROGRESS THEATRE Jazz in Reading Moscow Drug Club

£19, £17(conc), £10(U16) + bf
7:30pm
ticketsource.co.uk

FACE BAR Wicked Boy Promotions Eaten By Lions + Mr Pineapple + Violet Origin + Bone Idle

£6adv, £7otd | 8pm | 14+
eventbrite.co.uk

SAT 23 DEC

THE RETREAT Rufus Ruffcutt

Free | 8:30pm

THE BUTLER Swallow

Free | 8pm

FRI 29 DEC

THE BUTLER Syn City Rockers

Free | 9pm

SUN 31 DEC

RISING SUN ARTS CENTRE Club Velocity

The Pink Diamond Revue + Uncle Peanut + Grace Pounds

£7.70 | 8pm | All ages
wegottickets.com

SUN 7 JAN

WATLINGTON HOUSE Readifolk Carolyn Robson & Iris Bishop

£8otd | 8pm

MON 15 JAN

PURPLE TURTLE Groove Cult Shindigs Turtle Underground

£Free | 7:30pm | 18+
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the Dungeon.

FRI 19 JAN

FACE BAR Club Velocity/New Mind Eater/Jo Jo & the Teeth

£15.40 | 8pm
14+(U16 w/adult)
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Monday 18th March, Face Bar

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SUN 21 JAN

WATLINGTON HOUSE

Readifolk

Conor Reynolds

£8otd | 8pm

MON 22 JAN

PURPLE TURTLE

Groove Cult Shindigs

Turtle Underground

£Free | 7:30pm | 18+

Live music every Monday in the Dungeon.

Email listings info to copy@
sound-check.co.uk

FRI 26 JAN

FACE BAR

Stogfest Promotions

A Band Called Malice + The Skangsters

£14adv, £15otd | 7:30pm
tickettailor.com

MON 29 JAN

PURPLE TURTLE

Groove Cult Shindigs

Turtle Underground

£Free | 7:30pm | 18+

SAT 3 FEB

FACE BAR

Club Velocity & New Mind

Screaming Dead + The Freudian Session + D*S*A

£8.80 | 8pm | 16+
Horror Punk legends!
wegottickets.com

RIISING SUN ARTS CENTRE

Club Velocity & New Mind



Tom Webber

£11 | 8pm | All ages
wegottickets.com

THE BUTLER

Shadow Promotions DIY

The Latchkey Kids + Dan Bibby & the Aesthetic Knobs

+ Masquerader + Modern Shakes + Batwings

£5adv, £7otd | 6pm | 18+
wegottickets.com

SUN 4 FEB

SUB 89

Heavy Pop

Pip Blom

£17.60 | 7:30pm
14+(U18 w/adult)
gigantic.com

WATLINGTON HOUSE

Readifolk

Dove's Vagaries

£8otd | 8pm

THU 8 FEB

SOUTH STREET

Belinda O'Hooley

£19 | 8pm | all ages
whatsonreading.com

FACE BAR

Heavy Pop

Courting

£15.40adv | 7:30pm
14+(U18 w/adult)
gigantic.com

FRI 9 FEB

PROGRESS THEATRE

Jazz in Reading

Jean Toussaint Quartet

£19, £17(conc), £10(U16) + bf
7:30pm
ticketsource.co.uk



Puma Theory @ 19Something Festival, FaceBar, 04.11.23 Photo: Alex Marlow

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This. @ Rising Sun Arts Centre, 24.11.23 Photo: Alex Marlow



READING AT NIGHT Calendar 2024

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Venue Profile: The Castle Tap

120 Castle Street, Reading RG1 7RJ

Words and pics by Aulin Barton Brown



On Castle Street, just west of the town centre lies the The Castle Tap. For those who have not yet discovered all it has to offer, you will be greeted to a narrow space with a snug corner against a wall decked floor to ceiling with books and board games and a fireplace sat comfortably in the middle.

The bar area's large chalkboard lists the quirky beer selection, an extensive range of whisky, and... an assortment of cheeses! To the back of the room you'll find a piano and perched on the window above is Neville – a toy crow that acts as a sort of mascot for the place.

The Castle Tap has evolved beyond what you could come to expect from a pub of this size. The place's cozy nature draws the more 'normal' interests like the darts team, board games social, and that kind of thing but pub gig season is in full swing and this place is set to transform and take on a new life, so I sat down for a chat with Cara Sheldrake who arranges most of the live events and would understand this transformation better than anyone.

After running The Castle Tap for a few years, in 2019 Cara took the opportunity to integrate live music into her workplace. You'll find music offerings just as varied as their drinks menu;

at the monthly open mic sees original material crossing the genres of blues, folk, and punk, plus spoken word poetry and stand-up comedy in the past. On alternating months there is a frequent supply of performers booked through Old Goat Promotions. "Would you believe that in the limited amount of space there's still enough room to create a very small mosh pit?"

For a more relaxed experience they book a professional storyteller twice a year which makes sense as the place is the kind of traditional setting where your mind could drift into a fantasy world. "I've heard something about you having sea shanties."

"Yes, about once a month we host shanties. It's a great crowd, people get really enthusiastic about it and we're really proud of that."

The venue operates with free entry (except some charity and fundraiser events) and a capacity of just 50 or so. Cara explained that this creates a very approachable atmosphere. This supportive, understanding crowd is good for bands and soloists too, taking some pressure off and allowing them to experiment with new material. A band called Captain's Beard had some of the members dart out the front door and run a lap

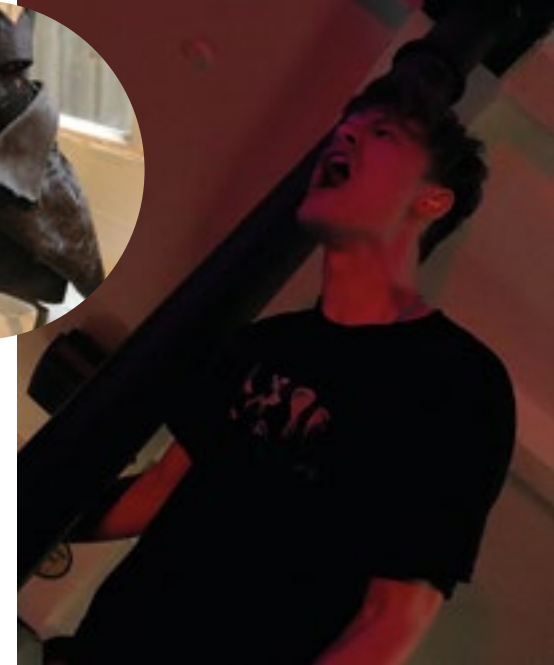
round the building all whilst still performing.

The Castle Tap is great for bands to take their first steps in front of an audience of strangers. Cara remembers Masquerader playing one of their early gigs there and making a return visit later headlining a gig with support from Lee Switzer-Woolf, Personal Issue, and Panic Button. "It sounds like you've got a good thing going, how should local bands go about getting in touch?" "The easiest thing is to email and from that we can meet up and have a chat." (castletap@gmail.com)

A few nights later I returned for the Masquerader gig. Opening the door I was met with a crowd of people eagerly leaning in on Panic Button's performance. What had previously been a small corner by the fireplace was now centre stage to Reading's most energetic punk and rock bands. After each set, band members simply merge into the crowd.

When Masquerader took to the stage, the boundary between band and audience had been shattered. It wasn't long until frontman Danny stormed through the riotous crowd making his way to one of the pillars, climbed it and continued the set from there as bandmates Tim and Chris played on watching safely from ground level.

You'll understand now what makes The Castle Tap's appeal so special and why it should be added to your regular roster of venues. You won't feel the usual separation between artist and spectator. The way they hold events encourages the audience to feel like part of the festivities – whether it's jamming in the mosh pit as the band performs mere feet away or joining in with shanty sessions.



The Castle Tap really is more proof to the idea that Reading's vibrant music scene can't be competed with. The recent saddening closure of The Grumpy Goat was another wake-up call that these independent music venues deserve to be treasured. "Any plans for the future of The Castle Tap?"

"When we introduce something new we want it to be different in a way that doesn't clash with the other great things going on in town. Our key goal is to continue putting on three good gigs a month, and to encourage more people to get in touch and play." ■

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