music

The Cribs

The Ting Tings

Does It Offend You, Yeah?

Joe Lean & The Jing Jang Jong

Tour stories

The NME tour bus rolls in to Bristol next week – it's an annual event that in the past has brought bands like the Kaiser Chiefs, Coldplay and Franz Ferdinand to a wider audience.

The band to watch this year is undoubtedly Joe Lean & The Jing Jang Jong.

They played their first gig just last summer, and have been greeted by a frenzy of hype ever since, with a stack of effusive magazine articles by the time they'd released their debut single, Lucio Starts Fires, in October.

But Joe and the rest of his band are determined to prove that they're worth all the column inches by gigging relentlessly, and as if to prove the point Joe was travelling between performances when he spoke to 24seven.

"I'm in the van," he tells me down a crackly phone line, "we're on route from Sheffield to Portsmouth. We're really tired, it's our last date of this tour tonight and we're all in very high spirits. Exhausted; but exhausted because we've been doing really fun things. So it's a pleasurable kind."

They toured last year with CSS, and Joe has very kind words for the exuberant five girls and one guy Brazilian popsters.

"Oh, they're lovely people. Everyone you speak to will always talk about how friendly they are."

But CSS aren't the only big names that the band have toured with in the past few months – they've also supported Dizzie Rascal, who became good friends with the band, and Babyshambles.

The extremely polite Joe doesn't have any bad stories about tabloid favourite Pete Doherty, either.

"All of Babyshambles were really nice, it's been a good experience. We've had such good times, everyone's been really nice to us and made us feel really welcome. We've been lucky boys to have been asked to go on those tours, we're very grateful."

And after the briefest of breaks, the band are back on the road again for the current NME tour, which takes them all over the UK, plus a trip to Ireland.

Joe's clearly excited about it, but he does let slip a slight suggestion of concern at another extended trek on the road.

"We're really looking forward to that. It's a long tour, isn't it? I don't know the exact length, I think the tour manager will probably keep that from me so I don't run away," he laughs.

Joe is trying not to get too worried about all the "hotly-tipped" pressures.

"It's such an unhelpful thing to say; you can't tell people what they're going to like," he says sensibly. "And also you can't predict the future.

"It does mean that it's something that we're really looking forward to as a year because it's going to be an opportunity to silence all of the hype and release our record."

Rather than bask in the hype, Joe and the rest of the guys decided that they'd better ensure that they were worth the praise, and that's the reason why they've been practically living on a tour bus in recent months.

"We had to somehow balance out how much we were being written about with how much we were playing. Because nobody had heard us.

"People were saying that we sounded like people we had no sonic similarities with, some were saying there were four members in the band.

"There was so much miscommunication and Chinese whispers, so we were determined to go out and show who we really are.

"We have been slightly amused by how wrong people in the press have got it," he laughs good-naturedly.

Joe may only be 24, but he's already got plenty of experience in the entertainment field. He's an actor you might recognise from his roles in Peep Show and The Tudors, and he was the sticksman for the Pipettes for a few years.

So has he long nourished a desire to get out from behind the drum kit?

"Not really. I didn't form this band to leave the Pipettes, this was a band to have fun. I just wanted to see my mates in the time I wasn't on tour with the Pips."

Joe didn't have any great expectations for the Jing Jang Jong project and he explains that his bandmates weren't chosen for their musical abilities.

"I love making music, it's what I do in my spare time, so I just wanted to form a band with people that I liked.

"I asked everyone in the band to join me before I even heard them play. I'm being totally honest with you," he exclaims as I laugh. "There were no aspirations for this band at all. This combination of people just wanted to have an excuse to hook up for a few hours every week to drink and party and make music together."

They did this for the best part of a year, and while the band were increasingly keen to play live, Joe insisted on waiting until they were good enough.

By an accident of fate, at the band's first gig were what Joe calls "people" – that is to say people from the music industry. They'd come to see the since-forgotten headline band, but were rather more impressed with the addictive indie-pop of the support.

"I think they came to see the headline band," Joe explains, "but then they saw us as well, then everything became this kind of intense fiasco-slash-great experience."

In some ways this stroke of luck has also been a bit of a millstone to the band, too, with people assuming that they've come from nowhere. Joe has occasionally been forced on the defensive.

"I know a lot of people can get jealous – 'I haven't heard of them before, why have they got a record deal?' Well, because the A&R man was at our first gig, it's not our fault."

Helen Sloan

● The NME Tour comes to the Carling Academy on Tuesday, February 19. Tickets cost £15.50 – call 0844 477 2000.

Other bands: The Cribs, the Ting Tings and Does It Offend You, Yeah?

It seems that the theme for NME tour 2008 is bands with daft names.

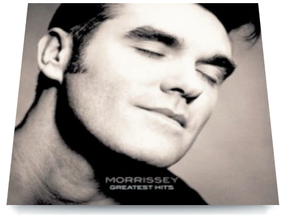
It may be headlined by the fairly sensibly-monikered Yorkshire band the Cribs, but otherwise the bands seems to have come up with their names in a moment of silliness.

As well as Joe Lean & The Jing Jang Jong, there are the Ting Tings – a Manchester-based art school duo that built their reputation through playing at house parties across the city.

Completing the four-band line-up are Does It Offend You, Yeah?, an electro-rock quartet from Reading fronted by the improbably-named Morgan Quaintance.

music

Morrissey
Greatest Hits
(Universal)



Never far from the headlines, here's a second rather perfunctory Best Of package from La Moz. It's a mixed bag, and poses as many questions as answers.

Of course, over a fine 20-year solo career there are always going to be a few quibbles over the tracklisting, particularly among his supremely loyal and passionate fanbase.

But that notwithstanding, odd inclusions of so-so recent songs such as Let Me Kiss You and I Have Forgiven Jesus to the exclusion of the likes of November Spawned A Monster, the wry We Hate It When Our Friends Become Successful and the cheeky You're The One For Me Fatty seem perverse in the extreme.

Still, the rocking clatter of First Of The Gang To Die and Irish Blood English Heart, from his You Are The Quarry comeback album, still pack a terrific wallop, and his finest individual moment, Everyday Is Like Sunday remains a peerless slice of black humour and wistfulness. And at least National Front Disco was dropped – he's not gone completely Britney bonkers.

(Steve Harnell)
Released: February 11
★★★☆☆

Michael Jackson
Thriller – 25th Anniversary Edition
(Sony/BMG)

With no new material realistically imminent, this revamped version of the biggest-selling non-compilation album of all time is no doubt intended to mark the rehabilitation of Jacko from the artistic and personal doldrums.

There's an admirable ambitiousness about some of these very familiar tracks, from the African chorus vocals of Wanna Be Startin' Something to the ridiculous Vincent Price cameo in the title track. Eddie Van Halen's poodle perm metal guitar solo on Beat It is so bad, it's good, too.

Lesser known tracks such as Baby Be Mine, Human Nature and P.Y.T (Pretty Young Thing) have aged well. Only the mawkish Paul McCartney duet on The Girl Is Mine stinks the place out.

But where this new edition falls down are the totally pointless reworkings bolted on as additional tracks. Main offenders are Black Eyed Peas' will.i.am and Fergie – no surprise there then.

And even the usually reliable Kanye West turns in a mediocre remix of Billie Jean.

(SH)
Released: February 11
★★★☆☆

Clare Teal
Get Happy
(W14 Music)

Seeing as though she used to work for our sister paper, the Bath Chronicle, I should feel a little loyalty to the Clare Teal cause.

But it's hard to get too excited by what is essentially a very middle of the road selection of cocktail jazz standards.

Teal's a multi-award-wining Brit jazzer though, and is pretty much untouchable in her field. Her voice is pretty, it's just that these old classics are covered in a very unadventurous way.

Teal delivers a nice performance on the old weepie Love Hurts, and there's an easy-going flow to the Cole Porter standard Begin The Beguine.

To her credit, she also removes the cheese from Neil Sedaka's Breaking Up Is Hard To Do. Great piano-playing also lifts a classy version of Time After Time.

Of her own three original co-writes, Get On It, Sam is a nice homage to mid-Sixties' Burt Bacharach. I can't say though that the world needs another run through of Get Happy, or for that matter, a polite version of Van The Man's Moondance.

(SH)
Released: February 25
★★☆☆☆

Laura Marling
Alas, I Cannot Swim
(Virgin)

First impression is that there must have been some mistake – this stunning collection of songs can't possibly have come from the 17-year-old Reading girl.

But this precocious young woman has managed a collection of songs that a much more experienced musician would be proud of, yet is still completely appropriate to her age. It's all first-person stuff, but not at all self-indulgent.

Most of the songs seem to be based on Laura's relationship with a difficult young man. On the startling My Manic And I, she reveals how she copes – it's a song full of love, but then she punctures his adolescent posturing with a cynical "I don't believe him".

Current single, Ghosts, is about the spectres of past relationships that haunt every relationship, while Cross Your Fingers balances a nursery rhyme rhythm with sinister lyrics.

(Helen Sloan)
Released: February 11
★★★★☆

Songdog
A Wretched Sinner's Song
(One Little Indian)

Lyndon Morgan, frontman of Songdog, is also an award-winning fiction writer in his spare time, so it's no surprise that this album is a bit of a literate beast.

Tom Waits is an obvious reference point, but his tales from the underbelly of "normal" life also bring to mind the writings of Charles Bukowski,

The music has a borderless and timeless appeal, mixing up mentions of outmoded hairdos – beehives and Marcel waves – with references to iPods.

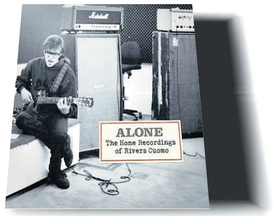
These are relationship songs in the main, and there's lots of angry and sordid sex – with lawyer's wives, with women who see other men, in toilet cubicles.

But he talks of women with affection and regret, and the sparse backing of piano or guitar makes this a beautiful hour of music.

"Broken hearted is my default mode", he says on She Let Me In By The Back Door. These are songs of unhappiness, but Lyndon's own wretchedness is a gorgeous gift to the listener.

(HS)
Out now
★★★★☆

Rivers Cuomo
Alone
(Geffen)



This collection of 15 years' worth of demos from the Weezer frontman serves a couple of purposes, one of them being to get some of the songs from an unfinished rock musical out in the open.

These work least well; they're self-indulgent and without the whole narrative they don't make much sense.

The album also makes it very clear that Rivers is the creative force behind Weezer.

The demo version of their breakthrough hit Buddy Holly is raw and ramshackle, but musically identical to the one familiar from hundreds of radio plays.

The extensive and surprisingly frank sleevenotes explain that the song actually refers to tension between Rivers and his bandmates.

A cover of Ice Cube's The Bomb is funny just once or twice, while after listening to the synthy This Is The Way, fans will probably be relieved that is didn't make the cut for their sixth album.

Elsewhere, though, there's plenty of good stuff like the affecting Longtime Sunshine.

(HS)
Out now
★★★☆☆

Various artists
Folk Awards 2008
(Proper)

If you love folk music, buy this. In fact, buy it anyway, because this is a superb collection from some of the most outstanding singers, musicians and songwriters working today.

Essentially, this 2CD set is the shortlist for the annual BBC Radio 2 folk awards, which were announced on Monday.

You'll find some great names, like Richard Thompson with Dad's Gonna Kill Me, about a soldier's lot in Baghdad; the evergreen Martin Simpson, with a lament called Never Any Good; Yorkshire's Kate Rusby with Bitter Boy, from her latest album; and the West Country duo Show Of Hands with the tender love song Are We Alright?

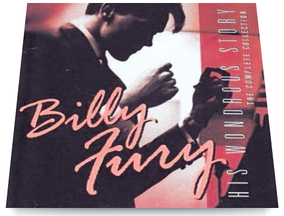
There's also the unexpected. Tunng with their gentle, melodic Bricks, for instance – it's brilliant, even if the lyrics are bizarre; Bella Hardy with Three Black Feathers, and Lisa Knapp with Steeleye Span's Blacksmith.

The folk tradition is not just alive and well, it is thriving, and this collection shows the depth of talent we have on these islands.

A bonus CD features the six finalists for the 2008 Young Folk Award.

(Rob Stokes)
Out now
★★★★☆

Billy Fury
His Wondrous Story: The Complete Collection *(Universal)*



It's true to say that, in the Sixties, Billy Fury had the best claim to be the "British Elvis".

Yet, ultimately, Halfway To Paradise remains an epitaph for a career fraught by fragile health and an almost pathological shyness – the release of this hits collection (so not much rock'n'roll here) marks the 25th anniversary of Fury's untimely death, at just 42, following two heart operations.

With 26 hit singles between 1959 and 1966, he was Decca Records' most successful singles artist, and there were another three Top 60 hits out of four singles released during his comeback on Polydor in 1982/83.

All 29 tracks are on this CD, not in chronological sequence but in order of chart placings, from highest to lowest, starting with Jealousy and Halfway To Paradise from 1961, and ending with the comeback singles, reflecting mainly the persona of the melancholic balladeer for which he is most remembered.

(Geoff Ward)
Out now
★★★☆☆

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