



Reasons to be cheerful

Kicking off Friday night of Wallingford's 24th Blues and Beer festival, Tensheds gave us a diverse set of songs that evoked the drawly Tom Waits and the Dylanesque. His awesome keyboard technique allows him to give a barrelhouse blues base figure on the piano with his left hand while doing a harmonica solo using his right. There were classical flourishes (Matt Millership is a classically trained pianist) to accompany his rough-edged vocals on lines like, "If love don't feel right, what are you here for?" He's no slouch on the guitar too. The flying fingers, trills and felt hat don't obscure the feeling in his songs.

From under his pork-pie hat, Papa George dished out slices of choicest blues. With bottleneck virtuosity and slip-sliding riffs on a National steel guitar, he cut the sound dead before launching the next astonishing run. He also brought a combination of his own songs and big blues tunes like Honky Tonk Woman on a Fender Strat.

The Blockheads brought a smile to Wallingford, and gave us many reasons to be cheerful, selling out the Friday night session. A boisterous singalong to 'Sex and Drugs and Rock'n'roll' might not be very Midsomer Murders, but still felt very Wallingford. Ian Dury is no longer with us, of course, but Chaz Jankel's jazz-funk influenced tunes sounded as fresh as ever, with a pin-striped Derek Hussey delivering Dury's chirpy lyrics from behind trippy glasses. The sax lines were fantastic, especially on 'Hit Me With Your Rhythm Stick' - where the sax player has to play two saxophones at once. The fabulously-toothed Norman Watts-Roy served up irresistible bass lines - and was so clearly having a ball, as were we all.

Saturday afternoon is a relaxing family time where toddlers can run about and dance to songs of anguish and tragedy while their doting parents look on. Age is no bar to enjoying the blues, either catching some rays under the eye of St Mary-Le-More's church tower or inside up close with the bands.

As well as singing her own material, Jodie O'Callaghan puts her own stamp on classics like 'Dear Prudence', 'Common People' and 'House of the Rising Sun'. Her powerful country-tinged vocals owe something to her time in the US with Judy Collins. She first sang in public, just round the corner at the local pub when she was just 13, and this year was her tenth Beer and Blues festival.

Thomas Ford is an astonishing wiry one-man blues band who sounds more than the sum of his parts. He brings 'songs of misery and despair because he's from Plymouth'. This included a driven version of Blind Willie McTell's 'Statesboro Blues', and 'Death Letter' by Son House, the former pastor who liked to pick fights with other bluesmen. Howling harmonica and smeared bottleneck open chords are part of the raw evocative soundscape he creates - close your eyes and you're in the Deep South in the 1930s. Thomas also sings his own songs, such as 'Danger Blues' about a life on the road from someone who doesn't like to leave the house.



Mumbo-jumbo combined humour and flamboyant jackets and free personalised kazoos. With the jokiness of Chaz'n'Dave, but with Latin jazz trumpet and elaborate keys, they are three very cool cats. Oliver Carpenter's husky vocals stand out, but also work effectively in harmonies with bass and ukulele player Chris Lomas. 'One Thing After Another' is typical of their well-crafted jaunty vibe. The whole of the Regal was tooting along on their kazoos while Oliver conducted.

Sitting outside as the sun sets in Goldsmith's Lane, with music drifting through, hand-selected real ale and maybe a burger is pretty idyllic. It's all part of the vision of the team of volunteers that makes Blues and Beer work. The beers came from as far afield as Cornwall and Yorkshire, and there were ciders, wine and soft drinks. Aside from providing top-notch blues, the festival provides much-needed funds for Oxford Young Diabetics (for insulin-dependent children with Type 1) and the National Orchestra for All, Oxfordshire Branch (music for disadvantaged youngsters) charities.

Ian Parker's 12-bar blues playing is neat as his denim jacket - his dexterous extended solos bringing spontaneous applause. His version of Jimi Hendrix's 'Little Wing' laid a gentle improvisation-laden lullaby on the early evening crowd.

The Larry Miller Band brought stadium rock blues to the Regal Centre with a wall of sound and monster licks. Full of prodigious hammer-ons laced with harmonics, Larry's work recalled Rory Gallagher and Stevie Ray Vaughan. His solo performance of 'Outlaw Blues' was full of pyrotechnics. His stage runs, guitar heroics and ever-present grin got the crowd swarming and cheering to the front of the hall.

There is nothing small about Big Boy Bloater with his stonking blues riffs. His band got everyone grooving - they are the ultimate good time band. Influenced by Howlin' Wolf, he has a powerful gravelly voice, and a dark humour to his songs. His new songs feature 'swamp soul, dark blues and twang'. The band were definitely 'havin' it large' and were a fitting finale to the weekend.

Once again, a marvellous weekend provided by the Blues and Beer team. Wallingford's a small town but punches well above its weight with musical and culture, and Wallingford Blues and Beer Festival is a great example - a reason to be cheerful, indeed.

More info: www.bluesandbeer.co.uk Wallingford Blues and Beer CIC is a registered charity run entirely by volunteers. All proceeds are distributed to local music and youth based organisations. This year the event is supporting [Oxfordshire Young Diabetics](#) and the [National Orchestra For All](#) (Oxford Branch). Contact: geoff@bluesandbeer.co.uk