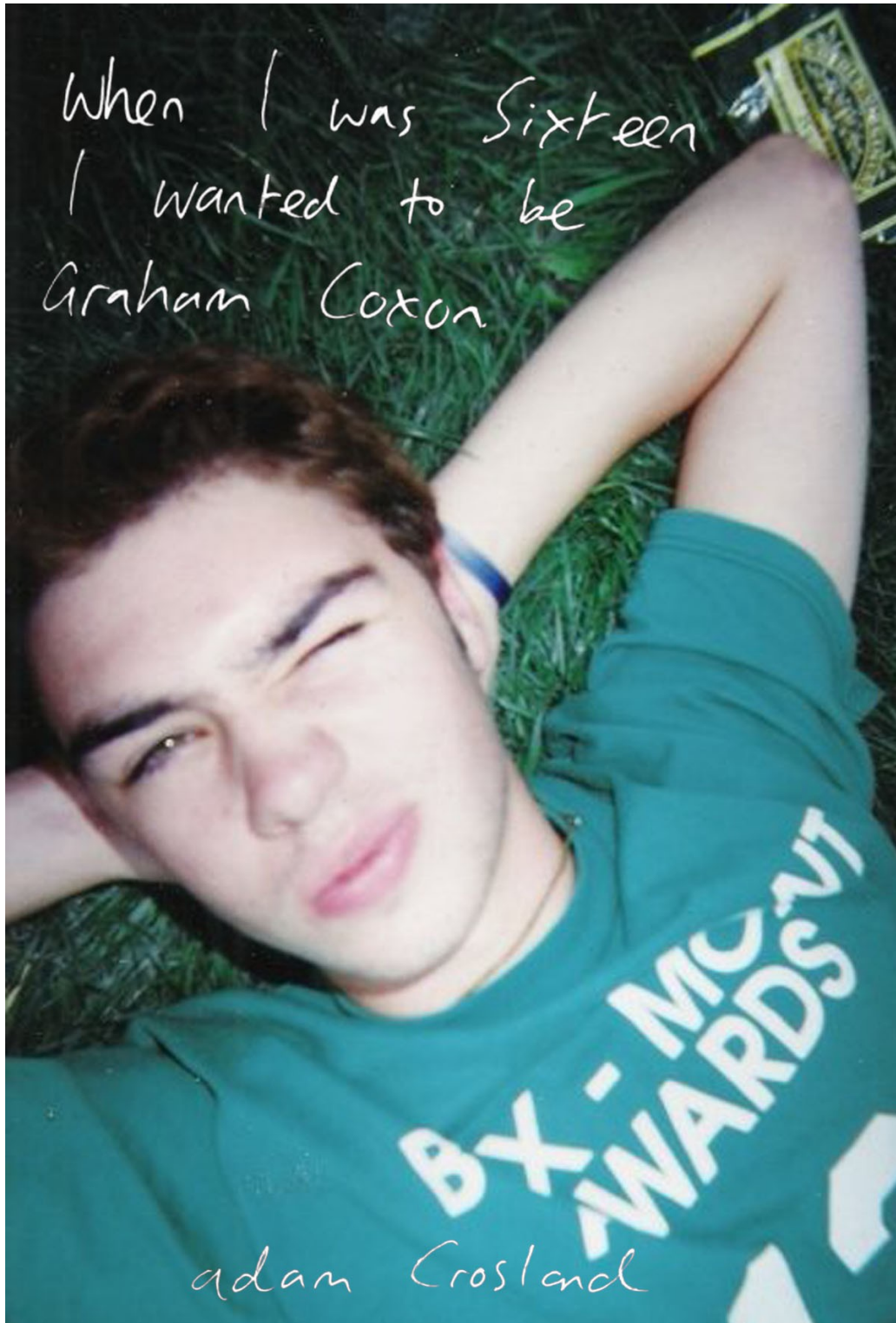


When I was Sixteen  
I wanted to be  
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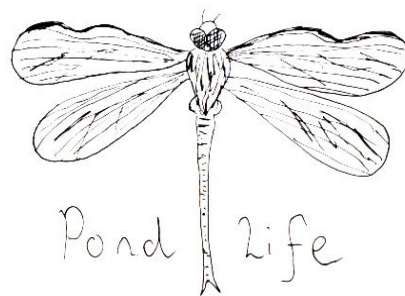


adam crosland

**When I was Sixteen I wanted to be Graham Coxon**

# **When I was Sixteen I wanted to be Graham Coxon**

**Adam Crosland**

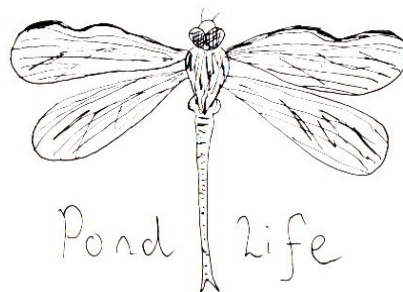


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*For Dan, Nath and Al*

When I was sixteen I wanted to be Graham Coxon. All of my friends wanted to be Noel Gallagher, but I just didn't like Noel, or Oasis. Graham was different. He wore geek glasses, odd t-shirts and made a racket on the guitar. Graham was ace. Blur were clever and cool.

The first time I took notice of Graham was when their eponymously titled fifth album 'Blur' came out. To be honest, I hated Blur up until then, cos I thought they were too laddy and poppy and everyone liked 'em. They were for the masses. I was a Prince fan, and a proud elitist as he was unpopular with all my teenage mates because he looked a bit gay. And so what if he was. But he wasn't gay. He talked about (vaginal) sex all the time and played mean guitar. But they didn't know that.

Anyway, back to Graham. So there Blur were – and they'd changed. The bouncy little oompha oompha pop songs had gone and in their place came something more dark and noisy. I swooned to the glorious growl of Song 2, and the crunching chug of Beetlebum. Now this I could relate to. And that's what rock stars should do isn't it. They should be people you look up to. Role models. Yeah, Graham was my sort of role model. He played noisy and yet strangely melodic guitar, looked kinda awkward and intellectual and did painting in his spare time. Yeah, Graham was my favourite Blur. Damon was too cocky. Alex was too pretty and Dave was too boring. Graham was just right. He was the perfect porridge.

So that was it. It was time to talk my parents into buying me my first electric guitar. I mean, I had to make a racket, just like Graham did. An acoustic just wouldn't cut the mustard would it. Being a typical faddish teenager they bought me a really cheapo fake Gibson jobby initially, just in case I floundered like a smoked herring. I had that for around 3 months and then it was Christmas. "Daddy daddy daddy, I want a Telecaster" is what I might have said if I were a spoilt teenage girl. I wasn't, but I did want a Telecaster.

Prince used a Telecaster on Purple Rain, Jimmy Page from Led Zep used one in the early days (Jeff Beck gave it to him as a present apparently) and of course our Graham used one. So colour was the next thing. They all had vintage Tele's and they were all blonde. So I had to have a blonde vintage one didn't I. So, for the next month or so I poured over all the ads in the papers for a second hand blonde Tele. And then I found one. It was in

Longleat and it was a real Fender (not a fake Squier jobby) and was £300. A lot of money you may cry but I had proved my worth to my parents as I impressed them with my brilliantly butter fingered renditions of Led Zep's classic Stairway to Heaven and Blur's Parklife, along with one of my own compositions 'Yeah yeah yeah yeah', which contained the clever rhyming couplet and catchy refrain - "I never wanted to see your face, I never wanted to be disgraced, Yeah yeah yeah yeah".

So I had my Telecaster, my youthful enthusiasm and my Graham Coxon style T-Shirt complete with number on the back and ambiguous writing on the front.

I was ready to rock n roll. But I needed a band. I did not want to be bloody Bob Dylan and start cellotaping mouth organs to my face and monkeys playing cymbals to my left buttock. I wanted a real band with living breathing people in it. And preferably ones that liked Blur...

## 2

School was over and it was time for college. Art, Music Technology and Geography A level lessons juxtaposed roughly against a typical, teenage mainstay of smoking, boozy parties and messing about with girlies. Now and again my friends and I would also act out scenes from Blur's Starshaped tour documentry, over a cup of tea at 'Mounties'. It was all good clean fun.

College did bring a landmark moment of my young life however. There I was sat down half stoned and half asleep, half listening to my music lecturer drone on and on about the more essential elements of midi sequencing when a new kid walked in, ten minutes late. I clocked him immediately, and instantly knew that we had a connection and could do business. I'll describe him from the bottom up:

Trainers – scruffy. Jeans – baggy. Jumper – casual sweater with cool American trainers brand. Face – Puppety. Hair – Scruffy. Basically to save me getting all homoerotic on you, this 19 year old (two years older than me) looked like a young Damon Albarn but in contemporary Damon clobber.



After the lesson finished we looked at each other and decided to talk. He told me his name was Dan and that he loved Blur. He also told me he lived in Stroud, played keyboards and guitar and most importantly he sang. Now this was bloody great I thought. Perfect. My plan was coming into fruition. I told him that I also loved Blur, played guitar and that I lived in Purton, which was near Swindon. We both agreed that the things we had told each other fitted perfectly with each others ideas of perfect band mates. Apart from the fact that Stroud and Purton were thirty miles apart. But hey Dan had a car. And this was great news.

Dan also told me that he knew a drummer called Nathan, that also loved Blur and that he was ginger, just like Dave Rowntree from Blur. I couldn't believe my luck. I could be Graham, Dan could be Damon and Nathan could be Dave. This was getting better and better. Except we didn't know any bassists that liked Blur. But you can't have everything can you.

The next few months consisted of Dan, Nath(an) and I rehearsing in my parents old horse stable. Dan and Nath would drive over from Stroud twice a week and we'd jam for three or four hours, writing songs, acting well cool and thinking about what we could call ourselves. If you have ever been in a band you will probably agree that the first few months are probably the most exciting time. After that it can tend to degrade into a rather turbulent marriage.

Dan wanted to christen us either Cuthbert or Ermintrude. What the hell was he thinking? I clearly wasn't thinking either because I couldn't think of anything. Nor could Nath. But in the end we all decided on Neon because subconsciously I think it reminded all of us of Blur.

After about 6 months we felt that we had enough material to do a gig, but we didn't have a bassist. Let alone a bassist that liked Blur.

By this time Dan and I were going into our second year at college and there was a flush of new growth coming through in the first year. I had noticed that this lad called Matt had joined my group of cronies cos he was also from Purton. He liked the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Deftones. He didn't like Blur. But he did play the bass.

After some chit chat and toing and froing over the next few weeks I managed to get Matt to come and have a jim jam with us three and to be honest when he wopped his bass over the songs we had written we all cried "halleluja" because we sounded like a band all of a sudden. This was great news. We could do a gig.

### 3

It was the summer of 99, college was on a break and we decided to have a party at me mam's. "Let's make it a fundraiser for bile bears" my mum barked. We all said ok, cos we wanted a party and we wanted a gig in the back garden. It was a deal.

My ol' mucker Nicky, from school, played first, Neon played second and my Sunday League footy mate Lee's band 'Nixon' headlined. We payed the Nixon lads in wine cos they were a proper band. The gig went ok. People said we sounded like Blur. We were happy with this. Maybe Matt wasn't as happy about this as the rest of us were.



Word got around college that we were actually pretty good and so we got offered an actual paid gig at my mate Sam's parents pub 'The Ghost Train' in Purton. We got paid £50 and played what we thought was a blinder. Lee came along, called me a gaylord and said that we should get a gig at the Garage in Highbury. I obviously misread his sarcasm in my drunken, post gig, ecstatic state, cos a few weeks later Dan and I went and had a look round the local market town of Highworth looking for a venue called the Garage. To no avail.

Neon then got a manager in Simon (Dan's checkout manager at Tesco) and started to get regular pub gigs, mainly in the Swindon and Stroud area – The Victoria, The Ghost Train, The Pelican, The Junction etc, intermingled with the odd battle of the bands competition (which we never won).

August bank holiday came along, attached to Reading Festival. Blur were headlining. I was still yet to witness them live. And even better, Dan and Nath, being members of the Blur fanclub, managed to get me and Dan's girlie at the time 'Tash' some tickets to see Blur play a secret pre-Reading warm up show at their old Uni – Goldsmiths. All very exciting.

Blur were incredible at Goldsmiths. They were playing in the Student's Union bar and I reckon there were only about 300 people there. I got right down the front and stood in front of Graham. I remember being awestruck by the reality of the situation. He was like a real man.



The Reading show was good too. They played my fave song 'Sing' and me and my mate Lewis went down the front and got squashed in the mosh pit.

## 4

It was clear from the beginning that Matt wasn't really right for Neon, and so we let him go and join his mate's band 'Crocodile Farm'. They played Deftones stuff and all my college mates preferred them to Neon. Matt tried to get me to join Crocodile Farm but I really liked Dan and Nath (and Stroud), and so decided to stick with the Neons.

## 5

A few weeks passed and Dan had done some shmoozing in Stroud and had come across a lad from nearby Avening, called Alex. Alex was a bit posh, went to an all boys school called Marling and played the guitar. I liked him immediately. I also liked that he agreed to play the bass. He didn't like Blur. But his name was Alex, he was a bit posh and he was going to play the bass, which was good enough for me. His favourite band were called Fugazi. Good name I thought. He'd always go on about them. How they ran their own record label and organised their own gigs. To be honest, I was intrigued.

Alex liked to play his bass through guitar pedals. Initially, none of us were sure about this, but after a while we came to terms with him not liking Blur, playing his bass through distortion pedals and his love of lo-fi. That's when things started to change. I can't lie, I still loved Graham, but we were all starting to get into more dissonant and angular stuff like Sonic Youth, Idlewild and The Pixies. Our sound started to change. Out went our cover of Blur's Song 2 and in came the feedback. We were evolving into a proper band. We were starting to find our feet.

I'm not really sure how it happened but Dan had recently gotten friendly with this older muso type guy from Minchinhampton called Jools. He'd written for Melody Maker and seemed cool, so Dan invited him to come and see us play at The Cross in Nailsworth one night, and after the gig we spoke and he told us he thought we had a lot of potential, if only we got rid of a few songs (namely a faux jazz one and a reggae one) and stopped trying to imitate Blur. We asked Jools to take over management proceedings from Simon and they had a bit of a chat about it. Afterwards, Jools basically told us that he wouldn't manage us, but he would hang around with us and drive us to gigs and the like. He was good for us was Joolsy. He introduced us to Slint's 'Spiderland' album, which inspired us greatly. I loved the way guitarist David Pajo played so simply and yet so violently. I think Nath thought the same thing about the drummer. And Dan liked the spoken word delivery of the vocals. Alex liked it because we were talking about something other than Blur.

Jools also played us a record by a band called Seafood. They sounded like a watered down version of Sonic Youth and they were on a label called Fierce Panda Records. Jools had this thing for Fierce Panda and told us that we should record a demo tape and send it to them. We already had a demo that we had recorded at our friend Rob's studio, but Jools said he'd pay for us to go into the studio to re-record his favourite track of ours 'Take it all' and two new ones called 'So Sorry' and 'Drone'. Around this time people were telling us that we sounded like Joy Division, which I didn't like, cos I thought they were cack, but to be fair, 'Take it all' did kind of have that sparse, yet relentlessly brooding sound that Ian Curtis and co' so bleakly made their own. The two newies 'So Sorry' and 'Drone' we all were quite excited about because they felt like a step in the right direction. Both tracks had

the spoken word delivery and quiet/loud dynamics so beloved of our new heroes Slint and The Pixies.

It was around this time that an opportunity to move to Stroud had arisen. I was starting to fall out with my Purton friends and was spending more and more time sleeping on Dan's bedroom floor, so I asked Jools if I could come and live with him in Minchinhampton. Amazingly he said yes, and offered me his spare room for £10 a week. I was 18, carefree, ambitious and was on a quest to follow my dream, so in a reckless yet heartfelt decision I told mum I was leaving home and going to live in Stroud.

## 6

I loved Stroud. I felt right there. Purton was a nice village, countrified and all that, but it's close proximity to Swindon and it's white collared lack of culture bothered my young soul and I never really felt like I fitted in.

The Stroud area is deep in the heart of the Cotswolds, hidden way in and amongst a small network of five valleys. All the houses are old and higgledy piggledy and it has this kind of tarnished, faded glamour to it all. Laurie Lee had based 'Cider with Rosie' around nearby Slad and Damien Hirst has his studios in Thrupp. There was definitely a sense of decay. But also a sense of forward thinking through it's Fairtrade values and conversions of old cotton mills and outbuildings into creative hubs for art and music. But it was the people that made it. They were different to the people I knew at home. They thought, acted and dressed differently to what I had known before. Everybody looked a bit dirtier, but in a wholesome kinda way. Their tastes were more esoteric and in turn the social scene was more exciting to me. The Pelican (The Peli) was mecca – a dark, grimy, hippified, druggy, arty, musicky honey trap for the young and old alternatives of Stroud. It was the place to be. An icon of the time. And Neon's main stomping ground.

I however was living at Jools's, up in Michinhampton, a small village built on common land, about three miles from the main town of Stroud. I'd also just joined the Art Foundation course at Stroud College, which Alex was on too, and had managed to get a job on the fish counter at Tesco. I was all set up for life in Stroud.

Neon continued to gig sporadically around the West Country, notably Bath Moles, Bristol Louisiana, and a couple of gigs at Gloucester Guildhall. One show in particular, supporting Post-rockers Mountain Men Anonymous at the Guildhall ended up in mild drama, as Andy (an art college accomplice) and I thought it would be fun to gently and carefully arrange the backstage furniture to look as though we had enacted some sort of rock n roll smash up. Our art installation backfired however, as the venue's promoter genuinely thought we had trashed the backstage area. We explained that we hadn't been violent in any way, but had merely created for the venue a masterwork that satirized the glorification of what it means to be a rock star. Unfortunately he didn't find our art, or humour, in the least bit funny, and the band and our college mates were immediately asked to leave the venue. And never come back.

In fact one of the members from the headline act reviewed us years later for Drowned In Sound and reminisces about the occasion:

*“Officially the best thing from Stroud ever (although there sure ain't much competition), early experiments as plain 'Neon' even once ended, allegedly, with a gig promoter's*

*testicles coming under attack from one of the band's entourage."*

I'm not sure anybody went for the promoter's knackers, but I like the sense of exaggeration and drama created by the reviewer.

## 7

Art college was great. I'd always loved drawing, but had coasted through my GCSE and A Level art because although I felt that art was the natural route for me, I didn't feel the route I was directed by my teachers was right for me. That all changed at Stroud College. At the time it was said to be the best art foundation course in England, and whether or not that was rumour, I would definitely agree. The tutors were inspiring, the course well organised and the vibe around the whole place was perfect. After a few months of dabbling in photography, metal work and graphic design, I chose my main subject of painting. Alex did too, and we had a studio space next to each other. We commandeered the studio's portable cd player and played Sonic Youth's 'Dirty' and At the Drive-In's 'Relationship of Command' pretty much all day, every day. All the other students simply didn't have a choice in the matter. We felt that the discord of the music fitted well with the liberal smearings of paint and faux-intellectual conversation happening in the studio.

Dan had started sending out our demo to record labels and promoters, which started the ball rolling when it came to getting gigs in London. Our first London show was posterred up and stuck around college with the headline 'Neon live in London' to which one of our college friends questioned, as she knew us to live in Stroud. Apart from that miscommunication, promo went well and we managed to get a bus load of our friends down to see us play in Soho. No record companies came, which was fortunate, as we were nowhere near good enough, but we did have a great evening in Soho.



This sort of thing would happen on a regular basis for about a year. Dan and I would train it down to London, go and visit a few record label's offices (namely Food, One Little Indian and Beggars Banquet), demo tape in hand, and ask to be let in (I think Dan had spoken to them on the phone first). An A+R man would let us in, listen to the tape and say he would come down and see us when we played in London next. But they never did. We did six gigs in London that year and no record labels had turned up. It was all rather disheartening for young ambitious upstarts like us, so we'd go home and make ourselves feel special by playing our demos, that had found their way onto the Peli's jukebox, over and over again to a pub full of lucky punters.

## 8

College had now ended and off to uni we scurried. I joined the Fine Art course at UWE Bristol, Alex the Fine Art course in Brighton, whilst Dan did Media at South Bank in London. Nath stayed in Stroud, working for Rapid Racking on Kemble airfield.

As a consequence, we couldn't rehearse very often anymore, but it didn't really matter cos by then we knew our set inside out. Another thing that made it quite easy was that we never wrote anything that we couldn't get away with playing badly or drunk. I'd have a five pint rule. The rule being, if I couldn't play my guitar bits after five pints then they would have to be simplified. I think Dan had a similar rule because some of his lyrics were equally throwaway and blasé. We'd also make sure that the inherent simplicity of it all would lend itself to being fired up when the nerves, bravado and drunkenness kicked in when we went on stage. The simplicity basically enabled the songs to ignite easier, creating a certain unique energy and dynamic when played raucously. We christened our sound Drunk-Rock.

We also started to glorify the cliché of being alcoholic rock stars too. Our hairs got longer. As did our bristles. Our clothes got stripier, dirtier and trampier and our attitudes got cheekier. It all went together quite well. We also spent time cultivating our ego's to merge nicely with our new look.

## 9

It was time for London gig number seven, and we were to play legendary punk venue – The Hope and Anchor. The Dark Lord (our Squarepusher loving website designer and loyal accomplice) had escaped Stroud and come along for the ride. He'd had his long, lank, locks cut off and was looking very svelte I thought.



We went for a walk, post soundcheck, up the road to get some pre-gig beers from an offy and came across a venue called the Garage. We were in Highbury. My thoughts went back to our first pub gig and Lee's banter, and then we walked back to the venue.

The gig was a winner. I broke a string on the epic and raucous set closer 'Drone', so decided to use the mic stand as a mock violin bow on my guitar in some of sort Jimmy Page through the eyes of Thurston Moore homage. A German guy came up after. His name was Dion, and he told us he had a recording studio, was in a German band called Tron and would we like to come and record that last track with him. We readily agreed. We also checked the guestlist to see if any of the labels we had put on it had turned up. Simon Williams from Fierce Panda had.

## 10

A few days passed and back in Bristol I was. Dan had followed up Simon's appearance with a phone call to the panda people, which resulted in them offering us an opening slot at the revered Club Fandango night at The Dublin Castle in Camden. Simon was intrigued by us. The promo on the Fandango website labelled us "a foot to the polished floor kind of experience" which I think meant they thought we were exciting. Which of course we were. So we had got our foot in the door, and were very happy about this. We also had this offer of a free recording too. So, off we popped, down to London again to go and re-record Drone and another newie – S.P.A.C.E, which was as catchy as AIDS, we thought, and would be our new record company bait.

Dion's studio was in a shed at the bottom of his garden, and was small but perfectly formed. Nath in particular enjoyed the organisation of it all. Everything had it's little place. Dan's friend Dan came down with us and hung out for a bit. I talked to him for a bit about Shrewdingo's cat because i'd just bought a book on metaphysics, and wanted to be a know it all, and then we cracked on with recording.

We were really happy with what Dion did. He sent us the mixed tracks via post a few weeks later and the beautiful sound of dissonance, we had created, washed over our heads, cleansing our wearied souls.

## 11

It was now the second year of Uni and I'd moved into a house near Bristol City's footy ground with my new mates Matt and Polly, and with them came a couple of their friends Chris and Caroline.

Life revolved around going to my studio at Uni to paint for a few hours. Matt and Polly would be there in the studios most days too, so we'd paint and chat and maybe go and get a beer at lunch from the Student's union bar. In the evenings we'd either play Zelda: The Ocarina of Time or go to the pub with our friends Rach and John. Sometimes i'd sing my song about battery chickens at the open mic night and sometimes i'd tell a girl I fancied I was in a band.

The Neon boys would come up to see me now and again as well, and we'd go and see a gig or summat, but the best one was when Al came up and we went to the Fleece to go and see some new noisy bands on the block. The NME had been raving about them all. Ikara Colt were headlining, then came The Parkinson's, then came a band that Al had wanted to see cos they came from Brighton – The Eighties Matchbox B-Line Disaster.

Their ludicrous name intrigued me. We both came away from that gig reeling after the sonic assault we had just witnessed. 80's Matchbox (as we called them ) were our absolute new favourite band. They sounded like all the best bands rolled into one. Kind of like if Jim Morrison was fronting a mad mix of Captain Beefheart, The Birthday Party and Joy Division. But better.

## 12

Dan had also made a new friend at uni called Oli, and we all wanted to go to Scotland. Oli had just passed his driving test, so off we went.

I liked Scotland. We stayed in Edinburgh for a night at Oli's cousin's house. I talked to someone about Idlewild, then it was suggested we go to Oban, which was about eighty miles North West, on the coast. We passed Loch Lomond and were tired and in awe of it's beauty, so we pitched our tent in a kid's playground by the lake because we had no money. We noticed that the village we were in was called Luss. Dan and I liked that, because we would say "Lush" all the time because we were from the West cuntry and it sounded the same. And it was indeed lush to be in a tent, drunk, in a kid's playground in Luss.

We arose from our tent in the morning feeling like paedophiles so we quickly packed up and scooted through the snow covered mountains and crystalline lochs to Oban.

Oli's cousin was right, it was very nice here, so we had a look around, went to a pub, ate scampi and chips and thought about what we should do. We went to the harbour and saw there was a small island a mile or so out, and so we found the ferry (practically a raft), got on, and drifted slowly across like brown rats on a beer keg.

The island 'Kerrera' was amazing. 'Twas only about three miles long by a mile wide, had a B&B, which we couldn't afford, about five houses and a dilapidated castle by the beach. We went and pitched our tent by it, took the instant bbq, three bottles of red, three mackerel, a newspaper and some bread we had bought from the shop in Oban and ambled up to the beach to make some dinner. We sat down with our bottles of wine, lit the



bbq and talked. I suggested that we wrap the fish in sea water soaked newspaper and steam them on the bbq. It was a good suggestion. A memorable meal it was – bread and fish in one hand, bottle of wine in t'other, nestled in a cove away from the wind, on a remote island in Scotland in April, next to an old castle, with two great mates. To this day, I can't lie, it has yet to be beaten.

Another good thing happened whilst we were in the land of the Thistle - Dan got a call to let us know 'Drone' was to be played on London's XFM. Dan had been sending off the new demo to all sorts of people and this was to be the first catch with the new bait. So that was good. We'd had a little break up north, looked at some mountains and life back in reality land was looking promising.

### 13

So, Scotland had been nice, and now it was back down to Landan Tan and the fandango.

We were yet to play at The Dublin Castle, so we were all quite excited. What would happen I thought. Maybe I would see my hero Graham (Camden's resident rock star) skateboarding down the street followed by a herd of teenyboppers.

We got to the Dublin Castle about half an hour before sound check, and went to go and gather our routine pre-gig tinnies. I guess we were all feeling a bit more nervous than usual due to the impending attendance of the Panda people.

The gig ended with the rather fantastical chaotic mess of 'Drone', and this time a wire fell out of my pedal board, bluntly stopping my guitar from working.

This is kind of how it went:

Picture Al and Nath wiggling out making an unholy, repetitive racket and Dan flailing around on the floor and crawling around on the monitors like a mad urchin. My guitar breaks and goes as quiet as a mouse, and I don't want to stand there like a pongey cretin, so I walk off the stage into the crowd, out of the venue and into the bar next door. I pick up a bar stool and walk back into the live room. The Neon boys are still going bananas on stage. So with the bar stool triumphantly held aloft, I squeeze through the bemused crowd, put the stool on my half of the stage, take a packet of baccy out of my grubby pocket and make myself a roll up, sat upon my beery throne. I feel very cool sitting here on display, rolling up a cigarette, whilst the other band members carry on with their din. The set ends in typical disarray, as Al chucks his bass on the floor to leave it feeding back, then we amble off stage, the sound of feedback and applause ringing loudly in our ears.

Two blokes come up to us immediately after and introduce themselves as Matt and Julian from CEC management. They tell us that was the best gig they'd seen in ages and would we want to go on tour with one of the bands they look after – The Eighties Matchbox B-Line Disaster. We say “yes, well that would be nice” and it's a deal. We are over the moon. It's a dream come true.

We speak to Simon Williams after as well, and he thinks we were great. He also thinks it's great that we are off on tour with 80's Matchbox in a few months, so he asks us to pop down in a week or so to Panda HQ to talk about stuff and do plotting.



Well, that was that. It was time to celebrate our success by spending the night sleeping rough in a park up the road, as we didn't have any friends houses to stay at or any money to get a room. A curious and very cold end to a whirlwind of a night.

## 14

A week passed and it was back on the train down to London to go and visit Fierce Panda. The offices were based on the ground floor of Simon's house in Holloway. Before the meeting, Dan and I (the other two couldn't make it) had our customary beer, burger and pint at the local 'spoons to take the edge off the day.

I liked it at Panda HQ. Phil would be sat there answering phone calls and looking at a computer, whilst we talked about what to do next. Simon gave me the 'Ash' tray (Brit-punkers Ash had released an early single on Panda) and it was time to drink tea, smoke and plan.

We played Simon a few other tracks we had recorded – 'Don't worry' and 'I can't go on'. Simon listened and said "hmm, maybe you could be our first demo band". Basically, he wanted to see what our new material sounded like. We had a couple of newies in the oven at the time – 'Brittania' and 'The Sender', and I guess he was trying to fathom out if we had enough good songs to make an EP or an album or summat. We thought we did, but even though we had a bit of a buzz about us at that point (we were also talking to Mercury records, and now had management and a tour in place), Simon hadn't quite made his mind up about us yet. So the meeting ended with Simon giving us some freebie panda records, including the incredible Lapsus Linguae album 'You got me Fraiche', and telling us he'd organise for us to have some downtime at Bath Moles studio to record those two new ones.

## 15

Lyn was our producer for the day at Moles. We played her a few Idlewild albums and told her we wanted to sound like that – heavy yet accessible.

We got there, set up our gear and then went to the shop to stock up on beer. There was a toasty machine in the studio, so we thought it'd be nice to take full advantage of it, so we bought a block of cheddar, some ham and some bread and cheese and ham toasties it was.

Jay from Mercury records came down in the evening to see how the demoes were sounding. He'd just been to have a drink with a band he liked, called 'People with Eyes'. We were all jealous because their name was ace and ours was crap. But that's life. Jay listened to Brittania and said "Kids will like it", and we were glad he said that because we thought it was sounding awful, and we weren't clicking with Lyn at all. She suggested that I play the whole of my guitar line to Brittania through a phaser, so it would sound like a band she'd engineered, called Spacemen 3. I didn't like this suggestion. It made my guitar sound like it was lost at the bottom of the sea under a pile of clams.

We stayed up recording literally all night. I remember Dan, Al and I watching kids tv in the morning in the chillout room. Nath was in the room next door recording his drums. There was a window seperating the two rooms and on the tv was Piglet from Winnie the Pooh,

and in the next room was Nathan, all pink and puffy with tiredness, playing drums. We observed that in our sleep deprived state, it looked liked Piglet was playing the drums to 'The Sender'.

We finished recording at 3pm the next day and were unhappy with the results. It just didn't sound like us. All the feedback had been ironed out, and it was all neat and compressed and sterile. I took the demo back to Bristol and played it to my housemate Matt. He agreed, it wasn't our best work.

## 16

We sent the tracks down to Simon for perusal, and feared the worst. As far as we were concerned, we'd spent a lot of Fierce Panda's money on something pretty much unusable.

Simon said we should come down to Panda HQ and have a chat, so we all went down to London, went to 'spoons in Holloway for a beer and a burger then went to go see Simon. We got there, sat down and Phil made us a cup of tea. Simon agreed that the production didn't do us justice, so would we like to go into another studio, with another producer and record an album. Well, this was bloody fantastic, we'd just agreed an album deal with Fierce Panda. And in a week or two we were off on tour with The Eighties Matchbox B-Line Disaster. If we had been comic strip villains we may well have rubbed our hands in glee, whilst simultaneously laughing, to add cliched, comedic vigour.

## 17

Duncan, an old friend from Purton texted me out of the blue. He was the bringer of grave news. He'd read in the NME that Transcopic Records (Graham Coxon's own record label) had signed a band called Neon. I thanked Duncan for the heads up and told the guys. We discussed the irony of the situation as regards to my hero Graham signing our Australian namesakes and then we discussed our need for a new band name. This was not good. Annoying in fact. We told Fierce Panda and they confirmed that yes, we would have to change our name.

Around this time, there were a load of MOR rock n roll, retro, revivalist bands kicking about, and what tied them together was this 'The' stuck on the front of all their names – The Strokes, The Datsuns, The Kings Of Leon, The Vines etc. The list goes on. We didn't really like any of these bands, as they were too faddish and a bit too one dimensional and safe, so we thought it would be nice to just stick a swift 'Le' on the front of our name and be done with it. And so, with a knowingly pretentious and yet ascerbically sarcastic wink of the ol' left eyelid, Le Neon was born.

## 18

It was a week or so to go before the 80's matchbox tour and I was in Bristol and feeling a bit excitable. So excitable that I thought'd have a go at doing a bit of graffito. It was pub time and off we went to The Mardyke in Hotwells. Our mate Austin had brought a spray can, so I thought it would be good to seize the opportunity while I could. I'd seen 'Sonic Youth' sprayed badly on a wall near my student house in Bedminster, so I thought i'd immortalize 'Le Neon' in the same way, so I spied a crappy wall and went for it - L,E,N.... and suddenly this man grabs the can off me and sprays it in my eye. I go for him (whilst shielding my face) and grab the can. The man scuttles off cursing me for being a hoodlum.

Luckily I am not blind and carry on up to the watering hole, unscathed apart from sticky red paint in my hairs.

For years afterwards the graffiti stayed as 'Len'. It made me smile every time I went past it, wondering what people might have thought when they saw the name Len graffit'd on the side of the wall. That Len musta been some guy.



19

It was time to go on tour with 80's matchbox. We were to do the last five dates of their recent tour promoting their debut album 'Horse of the Dog' and I had a new brown faux fur coat which I thought made me look like Syd Barrett, that was I eager to ponce around in, even though Matt told me that it made me look more like Pat Butcher.



Liverpool Barfly was first, so we booked a train, packed up our guitars and drum breakables (Nath was using their drummers kit, Al and I were using their amps) and hopped aboard.

We arrived in Liverpool at our mate Sam's student house, had bangers and mash and then made our way to the venue. It was all quite exciting as we were playing a slightly bigger venue than we were used to, and we had our own dressing room to fluff around in. 80's Matchbox were in the room next door. Eventually Guy McKnight, their singer popped in and said hi. We all said hi and I talked to him about my new favourite band Lapsus

Lingaue of Fierce Panda Records and how we had just signed to them. Guy was really nice. Ridiculously nice. It was a bit of a shock to be fair, because their onstage persona was really the complete opposite. Lapsus Lingaue had played some dates earlier on in the tour and Guy said “they are the best band in the world”. I agreed with him with great gusto, my nerves all a jangle with my neediness to engage with my new hero.

We finish our set and Al's blown up their bassist Sym's amp during the end of Drone. Their tour manager is not happy. But Sym is all smiles and tells us that shit happens. Crikey, these guys really are chilled out.

Here's our first ever proper live review:

### ***Le Neon, Little Hell, Eighties Matchbox B-Line Disaster @ Barfly, Liverpool***

*'Shame then, that Le Neon don't quite hit the mark. The band are good - the drummer is in a noisecore rhythm world all of his own - but you get the feeling the singer spent his formative years prancing around in front of his mirror to the sound of Blur's Modern Life Is Rubbish. It's not lack of inspiration that lets this band down, but lack of cohesion... The indifferent early crowd don't really help matters, and it all ends in a bad prog wig-out by the name of '1,2,3...'. Oh well, maybe next time.'*

Not great! But it was good to see the eagle eyed reviewer managed to spot the now very well hidden under loads of noise, Blur influence.

I'm not sure Dan will like that I added this review, but don't worry if you're reading Dan, i'll make it up to you later on in the book, i'm sure, and if that doesn't help then remember this, as Plato once said “ Opinion is the medium between knowledge and ignorance”. Let's just say, for now, that the reviewer was a little on the naïve side. And anyway, it was up to us to change his mind...

Hull Adelphi was the next stop. Well actually to be precise, a couple of little northern towns were, as we were too skint to pay for the train, so we'd hop aboard without buying tickets, then hide in the toilets until the ticketmaster went past. Thing is, we kept on getting caught out. So we'd get thrown off the train, and have to wait until the next train, on which we would do the same thing again. And so on.

We got to the venue a bit late due to our train hopping, but still had time for Tofu (the venue had ordered in vegetarian chinese for the bands) before soundcheck. It was also good to see that one of 80's Matchbox's roadies had clocked my fur coat, because as we went to the bar to get a pint he pointed at me and shouted across the room “ saucer of milk for that one”. It was all very funny.

The gig was better than the Liverpool one. We relaxed a bit and let our hairs drag all over the floor.

Here's another live review:

**EIGHTIES MATCHBOX B-LINE DISASTER + LITTLE HELL + LE NEON,  
'HULL ADELPHI.' 10/ 10/ 02.**

*With the best all-in-one-night bill since Elvis' comeback, you couldn't fail to have a great time. Whoever the hell LE NEON are, they are brilliant. They manipulate rock, punk and lo-fi and plaster a big fat 'post'- tag onto the front of each of those genres, as this Brit 4-piece jam out hugely original soundscapes jaggedly interrupted with manic melodies and an unassuming frontman who prides himself on the intensity of his vocal epileptic fits. Their set climax would do The Edible Five Foot Smiths proud, the frenzied whirl of feedback culminating in the guitarist playing his guitar with a monitor (as Jimmy Page used to abuse his with a violin bow in those Led Zepp glory days), while the bassist assaulted his innocent instrument with a mic stand, scraping an intoxicating and enthralling barrel of super-cool class.*

Much better than the last one don't you think. Dan, are we happy now?

We had to shoot off straight after our set because of train times, which was frustrating, but that's life. So we were in Hull, and were off to sunny Doncaster to stay with my grandma for the night.

We arrived at my grandma's at around midnight, but Joyce was clearly a rock n roll granny and cut out for this caper, as she was all up and ready for boozing with the Le Neon boys. I was very proud of grandma that night. She was good mush. She stayed up with us, getting pickled on voddy, whilst flirting with Dan, and then it was time to go to bed. Dan and I shared my old bed in the front room, whilst the rhythm section shared the bed at the back of the house. We were used to being gay sardines by now. And it was nice to have a warm, comfy pillow to rest our weary heads upon.

We woke up in the morning to the smell of delicious grease – Grandma had cooked us a fry up. We had a few hours to kill, so we went for a walk over the floodbanks of backstreet Donny. I relayed them tales my mum had told me, how when she was a kid, she'd see dogs with bricks tied to their legs dumped and drowned in the dykes of the floodbanks and how she fought off the boys that threw railway stones at her horses. It was all very bleak, but made for a good story.



It was time to leave for Leicester 'Sumo's' and we all bade Grandma fairwell. I gave her a peck on the cheek, she cried and we said goodbye.

Russell, our mate from art college appeared at the Leicester gig. He was surprised how much we had changed since the 'Live in London' days. After the gig we went upstairs and Andy, the guitarist from 80's matchbox ran up after us to tell Nath that he sounded like Captain Beefheart's drummer. Both Nath and Al were very happy about this. Al had been reading this Captain Beefheart biography, and got very excited about hearing that Don Van Vliet made all of his band mates hold their cigarettes 'the Beefheart way', to show strength in unison.

We sat in the tourbus with 80's matchbox and asked them about groupies. I guess we were after some. But they told us that they tended to be a bit rough around the edges, and that we wouldn't want them even if we could.

Later on, Dan rang up a youth hostel agency and all the hostels were booked up, apart from one, which was lucky cos we had nowhere to stay that night. So we said cheerio to the 80's boys and said we'd see them in a couple of days in Bedford.

The hostel was someone's house in the middle of a council estate. The host opened the door to welcome us wearing tight shorts and looked a bit too excited to see four young men on his doorstep. He was middle aged and a bit nerdy and I remember saying to Al that "I think he might be a serial killer". Always did love a good stereoype. But it got worse. In our bedrooms were porno mags, S&M flyers and posters of women on the walls. Also, Dan went for a wee in the middle of the night and the man knocked on the door to ask if he needed a hand. It was really bloody creepy, so we all huddled together in one room like frightened young children, watching the door all night.

In the morning our host made us cream buns, which were delicious, and we all joked that he had spunked into the whipped cream.



Luckily, we left unscathed and unsalted, and it was time to go home to Stroud for a couple of days, before the Bedford gig.

Bedford 'Esquires' was the gig we probably played best at. It was a shame we had nothing to sell, because we would've sold a fair few I think. Paul Tiper - Idlewild and 80's Matchbox's producer came along with Janey, a manager that was interested in us, and we asked him whether he would like to produce our album or not. I think I may have put him off with my erratic, egotistical behaviour in the end, because he politely declined. Shame, because we would have liked to have worked with him.

Bristol 'Louisiana' was a bit of a homecoming for me. All of my Uni mates came and witnessed us making a racket. It was pleasing. And Big Jeff came too. Any Bristolian gig goer will know Jeff. Actually I think he became such a cult figure in Bristol at the time, that he appeared on the hit tv series 'Skins'. Bizarre, 'cos we all knew Jeff quite well, 'cos he was a Stroudie too.

It was the end of the tour for us. And what an experience we had.



Going for it at the Bull and Gate...



and the Water rats





Des Res



"People ask what is was like being in Neon in 1999. Well as you can see, nobody has anything to say about it"



Camden Palace



100 Club





Non cliched promo pic



About five minutes before the landlord of Michinhampton Social Club pulled the plug on us for being too loud



Tramp chic



Dan , Oli and I at Death Disco. Feeling a bit jaded I think.

I started to go a bit mental when I got back to Bristol and Uni, and decided to really dedicate some genuine time to alcoholism. I guess most students and 21 year olds kind of do this, but I think the added devotion to cultivating my massive and increasingly fragile ego, in relation to my wannabe tortured artist/rock star persona, manifested itself by me going into some sort of freefall. It was all quite exhilarating. One night I slept in a shop doorway on Bristol's Park Street because I was too drunk to walk home. Luckily Rach and her then boyfriend Jesse (who incidently now plays keyboards in the band Keane) found me and helped me back to Rach's house, and a spare room. The next morning I woke up late, hungover to hell, and ran to college to beg my lecturer's and fellow students to crit my college work, after turning up an hour late to my end of second year assessment. I reeked of vomit and alcohol. Immediately after the assessment I thought it would be a good idea to carry on boozing and go on some sort of rampageous binge, which spiralled into a pathetic mess, ending with my mum coming down to Bristol with Todd and Harriet the dogs to rescue me from my self indulgence. I spoke to Matt last week about this event, just to make sure I wasn't delving into some sort of faux rock n roll hyperbole, but he just conformed that yes I was completely and utterly off the rails. This sort of thing happened quite a lot. I'd start drinking at 4pm every day and just drink and draw. I had a box of red wine next to my bed, which I'd top up from. Duncan, who was in Bristol at the time came to see me and told me I looked like a tramp because my teeth were black from drinking too much red wine and chain smoking. I went to the doctors and had a liver test, which confirmed that I had in fact managed to do some damage to my liver, which could however be rectified if I calmed down a bit. My skin kept on going blotchy and puffy all the time when I drank, as my liver wasn't coping with the toxins properly. I looked like a beetroot. So I went to a homeopathic doctor to prescribe me something which would counterbalance my drinking, so I could drink more without going red. It was all very George Best.

I basically couldn't deal with not being in control of things. We had a three or four month gap between the 80's Matchbox tour and the recording of the album and I was worried that something bad was going to happen inbetween, and my dream of recording an album on Fierce Panda would be dashed. By going off the rails I was trying to regain some control. It was basically just self harming. There's certainly a strange comfort in self destruction. That said, it was also very silly, because I really should've been just enjoying it all. I guess it's a bit like Gollum in Lord of the Rings, with his precious ring. It's so precious to him that he can't enjoy it. He's too busy worrying whether someone will take it off him, or of losing it, that he can't just enjoy it's power.

Finally, after months of going slightly barmy it was finally time to record our album. We'd managed to get Dan Swift at the helm, which was great because he loved Slint's 'Spiderland' and after seeing us live he said that we sounded like a "turbine of noise". He'd also engineered recently on Ikara Colt's 'Basic Instructions' ep, which we all really liked. Swifty got us. He understood that we wanted a big, raw sound for the album. Something that caught what we were like live. And so, that was that.

Fierce Panda wanted us to do a six track mini-album or ep, not unlike Idlewild's 'Captain'. So they gave us four days at Fortress studios in Shoreditch in London to get on with it and capture the essence of neon. Thing is, we had enough tracks to do an album, so we managed to talk them into letting us do nine tracks plus a couple of interludes. However,

we were still only allowed four days, so it was going to be a rather rushed experience for us and poor ol' Swifty. But we generally worked fast and didn't see that as an issue. Three tracks a day, with one day for mixing? Fine we thought...

Fortress was great. It had a massive live room for us to set up in, a proper big ol' mixing desk and a chillout room with a telly. Nath enjoyed watching Sky News on it in-between takes, whilst I'd sit there blankly watching, bored, eating endless dry roasted peanuts, and drinking cheap lager. We were all staying at Dan's in Elephant and Castle, so we'd get up at ten and get the bus to Shoreditch to get to the Studio for eleven, then work till around eight or nine. I loved recording the album. In fact I just love recording full stop. It's incredibly satisfying to see your hard work come to fruition. And producer's always tend to turn up the monitors, so you hear it all through mega loud, hyper quality speakers. It's a real blast.

Oh, we'd decided to call the album 'Luss', seeing as though we were all saying lush all the time, and mine and Dan's Scottish experience had really made an imprint on our impressionable young hearts.

So Luss it was. And luses we were whilst recording. We felt it necessary, that to capture our live sound on record we must be drunk, so basically, we made sure we were at least a little bit half cut during the recording of each song. I'd start drinking at midday, which turned out to be mildly problematic when it came to recording the second and third songs of the day. I remember not being able to play the opening guitar line of 'Take it all' very well, and Swifty getting frustrated with Nath and Al for not being in time with each other. We also took care in not tuning up our instruments properly. Al also made sure he used his half broken bass during most of recording – to Swifty's dismay. You can hear the crapness of Al's bass on the intro of 'So Sorry' and the out of tuneness during the majority of 'Dying'. It sounds grate. At the time we thought it all added to making a real sounding record. Swifty also wanted me to double track guitars, but for the most part I refused, believing it to be punk rock to have one harsh sounding guitar. And lame to have it sounding listenable. Such an odd child. But one that is wise to the verse of ponge.

So, we recorded all the tracks, did some interludes, complete with tin whistling and left Swifty in his hole to mix it all. Nine tracks in one day. I remember him being a bit irritable on the last day, and I couldn't understand why. I now understand that producers like at least a day to mix one track. Not one day to mix nine. Anyway, in the end, our manager Julian came down and said it sounded "Fucking A", so that was good enough for us. We had made an album.

## 22

So when you make an album, you need some artwork to go with it, to make it look all fancy an' that. My friend Alice had recently bought me a David Shrigley book, which I became kind of obsessed with. Dunno if you know the Shriggler, but he's quite famous nowadays and does these scratchy, sketchy, satirical drawings, that seem to transcend the line between hi and lo art. He's great he is. And so I thought i'd do my own rip off Shrigley book. Anyway, Al really liked one of the drawings from it, and suggested we use it as the album cover. And so we did.



The album was due for release in June, and it was now March and time to go on tour again and make some people like us. Or at least try our little hearts out to make people like us.

Fierce Panda had organised a rather nice little Spring tour, comprising of us, X is greater than Y, Further and Winnebago Deal. Winnebago Deal were a pretty good draw then, so we were more than happy to be aboard.

We couldn't afford to rent a van at that time, so we hired a little car for us to bob around in. It must've been quite a sight, what with us four and a load of equipment crammed into a tiny hatchback, arriving outside the first stop of the tour - Cambridge 'Boat Race' and taking our place in the car park alongside a tour bus and a tour van. All a bit Monty Python.



Seeing as though we didn't have any albums to sell as yet, we took along some demos to give away as promos and we also made a lucky dip box. The lucky dip box was a winner. Every dip was a prize. And what prizes they were. - plastic combs, mirrors, stickers and dog biscuits were all part of the Austin Reed. Fifty pence a go, and the punters loved it. Thing is, we ran out of money for prizes after the second show, so unfortunately the Le Neon lucky dip had to go on almost immediate hiatus.

Winnebago Deal were serious. It was almost as if they they didn't have a sense of humour. Take for example, the occasion when I spilt beer all over guitarist Ben's new guitar. I mean, anyone normal would have seen the funny side of it. You know, the irony of spilling beer over a thousand pound guitar? It was very strange, but he didn't find it funny. I remember

ringing Simon Williams during the tour, concerned that he had signed a band that weren't fun. Simon politely explained to me that he only signed bands that had a sense of humour and that I must be mistaken.

We also really started to smell. Four men drunkenly sleeping in a Transit van for a week or so isn't the most sanitary of things, is it? We had found various 'free' ways to wash though.

Supermarket toilets were our staple washroom. We'd go into the blokes toilets in the morning and have a good ol' gentlemen's wash and brush our teeth in the sink. Nath would take his mouthwash as well and do a bit of gargling. I'd like to think Al and Dan took in talc, but I think that may well be a lie, unfortunately. Anyway, judging by their bemused expressions, the customers that walked in were clearly very impressed with our rather ad hoc and unique approach to our ablutions.

Once we thought we'd kill two birds with one stone, by washing and exercising at the same time. We were passing through some Northern town when we spied a swimming pool. It was one of those fancy swimming pools with flumes and rapids an' that. So, we paid our fee and in we plopped. We didn't have any swimming trucks, but that didn't matter, we thought, as we were all wearing pants. As we larked about in the pool, our enjoyment started to be tainted by the reality of the situation; it was half term and loads of kids were starting to colonise the pool, in a haze of rubber wings and hairbands. I remember queuing up for the flumes, us in soaking wet undercrackers, surrounded by kids, when I looked down and saw the outline of Nath's willy pressing against his sodden boxer shorts, and suddenly I started feeling very uncomfortable. I think we all started to feel a bit weird, and after our wash and exercise, we quickly hopped out, got changed as quickly as possible and fled the place, our tails safely tucked in between our legs.



I didn't really enjoy the Spring tour as the venues weren't as full as the 80's Matchbox tour and the novelty of touring was starting to wear off a little. I think it was for all of us to be honest, as I remember Al being a bit mardy and not wanting to play the Hastings gig and Nath getting pissed off with having to drive all the time.



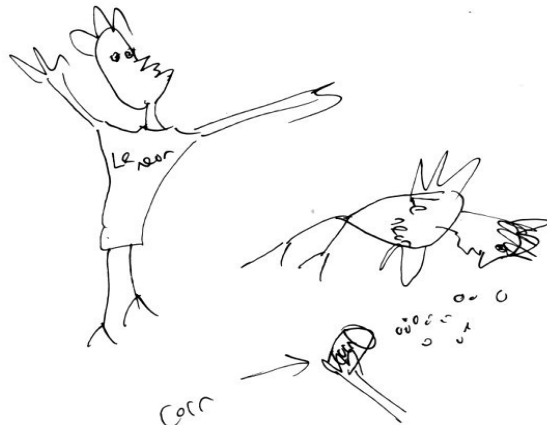
Julian at CEC was our manager. But being a band that has a bit of a buzz about it tends to attract all sorts, so we had a few other people interested in managing us at that time too, all offering slightly different things. We hadn't signed a contract with CEC so we were still free as such to choose, and right now, Julian didn't have much to actually manage – apart from our egos. Basically, managers in the music industry will always go for a band on the up, especially one that is looking to make the transition from an indie label to a major, because they take a big cut of the initial advance of the signing fee as payment for helping the band get the deal. And getting a bigger deal is basically what we were trying to do. Fierce Panda was, and still is a stepping stone label in ethos. They only really did album and single deals. They'd put out an album and a double A-Side vinyl single (S.P.A.C.E and Britannia, of which we made a fly infested video for, on Kemble airfield) for us, and were willing for us to try and get to the next level. We were starting to interest labels such as Beggars Banquet and Mercury at the time, so the time was now if we were to change management.

I mentioned Janey a few chapters ago, and she was one of those people buzzing around. She managed a band called X is Loaded and had great contacts with a label called One Little Indian, which we liked. She also promised to get us an agent, liked Blur and took us out for dinner now and again.

Bruce was another candidate. And to be honest, he was the one we really wanted because he managed Idlewild and Ikara Colt, which we all really liked and respected.

In the end, Bruce decided we weren't quite ready for him to take on and we were impressed and intrigued by Janey's promises. So we went for Janey. We just didn't click with Julian at the time, though now i'm older and a bit wiser I kind of regret not staying with Julian, cos he turned out to be quite a good guy (and a manager with proven credentials).

So, Janey it was. And it was off to The Windmill in Brixton for our first gig with Janey as manager. We'd had some T-Shirts made for the occasion, which we were all a bit disheartened about cos they came in weird sizes that didn't seem to fit anybody. I seem to remember the necks being really high. Dan and I put them on and ran around the venue before soundcheck clucking around, pretending to be chickens. It was all rather silly. But we were still disappointed.



Anyway, the gig was pretty good. We were supporting Biffy Clyro, and it was a secret fan club only gig in warm up for their Kentish Town Forum show. We played pretty well and had a throng of young teenyboppers down the front bobbing up and down to S.P.A.C.E. I think one of the young chitterlings tried to pull down Dan's trousers. My amp blew up a little bit, as per usual. Afterwards, one of the younglings from the front row came up to me to ask for a hug. This was strange, but appealed to my ego. Kind of like a PG rated groupie experience. Nath wrote about the gig for the Le Neon tour diary we had now added to our website:

**12/04/03**

**Biffy Clyro + Le Neon**  
**'The Windmill', Brixton**

*This was the first time we have played at the Windmill and I was glad to see some eager youths, music hungry after traveling from Edinburgh to see Biffy perform. We were soon at ease in the gloom of the place, subtle hints of our pub past. Time to drop the equipment and to get a few giggles in before the sound check.*

*We were soon summoned by the captain, a fairly erratic explosive minded person. We were soon making noise, to the liking of the captain, a few swift blows to his own head gets him in the spirit of things and he's twiddling the knobs like a hyper active child.*

*A short break to sedate ourselves once again before our 19:40 stage call. Ad's 5 second intro to Don't Worry flicks the switch and the Le Neon noise is in top gear. It's not long before things come to test our tempers. Adam's amp starts to splutter randomly, Captain is already crawling across his belly as if under heavy gunfire, thrashing at the problem.*

*Couple of songs later all is forgotten as the crowd start to grope at the confidence of Dan, distracting attentions from Alex's pint which gets swiped from under his nose by a cheeky little blighter. The crowd soon decided to return the favor and put on a performance for us too, tag team smooching between a group of four. One individual felt comfortable dropping her trouser and tucking her fags into her thong.*

*As the penultimate song gets into full swing so does the captain, like a mental patient out of control he throws a few more punches to his temple and frantically lurching back and forth on the lighting controls as if in a fit.*

*The gigs ends with the Drone of guitars and distorted warps from the bass, the room full of noise as we slope off stage.*

*All that was left was to distribute some limited demo version tracks from our 2 favorite songs available on the album. Anyone that bought one, we would like to know what you think. Any comments are welcome, it's always nice to get an email and you never know, you might even get a reply.*

*A thanks to Fiona for taking the time to say thanks "Wasn't expecting much of the support, but I was really impressed... shame I didn't manage to get a copy of the CD though... I'll definately look out for the album anyways."*

**Nathan - Le Neon drummer**

Our album was released on the ninth of June 2003. Press was pretty favourable to be fair, and we even got some decent airplay on Radio One, courtesy of Mr John Peel. To be honest, as I think back to all of the things I am most proud of in regards to the neon days, I think the John Peel thing may be the proudest. He is simply a legend and will be missed forever by a lot of people. He also played one of our fave tracks off the album as well 'The Sender', when he could easily have played something a bit more accessible, but then again, this is John Peel we're talking about I guess.

Here's a fanzine review of 'Luss', in fact reviewed by the aforementioned Fiona:

**May 2003 -[www.whitenoiseonline.co.uk/](http://www.whitenoiseonline.co.uk/)**

*Manic guitars and hyperactive vocals is what to expect from this album. Sounding something like early Idlewild indulging in a bit of a rough and tumble with The Vines, knowing quite how to define Le Neon is pretty hard.*

*'Luss' is Le Neon's first release after being spotted by Fierce Panda during 2002. First track 'Dying' is fast, furious and over a bit too quickly, but it's a great start, driving riffs and erratic vocals, deep bass lines and succeeding happily in getting your foot tapping, and head nodding, before stand out track 'I Can't Go On' kicks in, meandering slowly into action before building into a furious punk edged chorus. 'Luss' immediately conjures up images of seedy pubs and tiny clubs, with glorious feedback and distorted noises all over the place – listen once and you think it's okay, listen again and you're hooked, and a third time and you find yourself singing and dancing along – this album is most definitely a grower.*

*'The Sender' breezes past and 'Take it All' builds into a fantastically brutally raw track – that's another thing about this album, it seems organic, and rough at the edges, and managed to capture the band's energy terrifically well – something that a lot of band's find hard to produce.*

*Although all the tracks seem to follow a pretty much similar formula throughout the album, there is something different about each one, and at least it has a distinctive sound, whether it's the driving bass of 'Take It All' or the almost psychotic riffs of 'Don't Worry' – each track has something to offer – not least Daniel Clare's raw, rather ragged but gloriously suited to Le Neon's sound, clambering about all over the place, rather desperate in places.*

*The jangling guitars in 'S.P.A.C.E' and the frantic pleadings of 'So Sorry' are again thrilling and dynamic – whilst 'Drone' turns into somewhat of an epic, building slowly into a full out anthem, screaming vocals, whining guitars and dancing drum beats, before diluting into an ocean of distortion and feedback before the strains of a tin whistle are heard floating over the top – which leads nicely onto final track 'Britannia', which is a nasty dirty rumbling track... but beautifully so, incredibly manic and messy – this is what is great about Le Neon... the seeming lack of focus produces a dynamic dark mess which leads into a tin whistle symphony and some background chatter!*

*'Luss' is fast-paced, raw and furious – seemingly pure energy in places, it manages to capture the essence of a great live band, and give it all a new dimension on CD – I haven't been able to stop listening to it, and it just gets better with each listen.*

*4 out of 5 - Fiona McLaren*

And here's a more sober review in Kerrang:

**October 2003 -www.kerrang.com (published in magazine sept 03)**

*Nine tracks to get sweaty to in a black hole somewhere.*

*Remember how dirty it sounded the first time you heard 'Touch Me, I'm Sick', by Mudhoney? Well Le Neon are dirty that way - unhinged, sloppy, a bit on the creepy side, like they haven't washed for a month.*

*Luss sounds off the hook from start to finish but is ultimately a bit of a patchy release, with Daniel Clare's vocals occasionally stepping over that cool, too fucked to care line into blase and irritating territory. The songs here are also a little to sloppy at times, swinging between thrilling dirge rock (Don't worry & Dying) and just plain unrehearsed, (The Sender). But given that this is the Stroud's outfits first ever release, it shows an enormous amount of promise. Find them in a basement near you soon.*

*3 out of 5 (KKK) - Rae Alexandra*

There were loads of reviews, but I think these two give an honest appraisal of us at that time. I mean, we were pretty good, but were nowhere near the finished article. I think, that both reviews made contrary yet clear correlations between us trying to capture our live sound on record and how successful the outcome. Opinions, opinions...

## 27

We had managed to smuggle our way into a sold out Glastonbury Festival by working for Oxfam. We'd been given our own segregated camping area away from the crowds, complete with showers and a free breakfast. All in return for working over the weekend. Or not.

A bunch of us Stroudies had all got ourselves these Oxfam hand outs and it was great. I'm not sure any of us actually did any stewarding or litter picking, so we all ended up paying the ticket fee in return for us taking advantage of what the charity offered. Like I said, basically we got into Glasto for the asking price, but we got the added bonus of free showers and brekkie. Oh what tinkers we were. I decided to take it a step further. We all had these little Oxfam neck thingies, so I thought it would be fun to use this power badge to swindle free fodder. So every time I passed a food stall and fancied summat from it, I went over flashed the badge, gave them a sob story saying what a long horrible shift I had done in the name of charity and could I have some free food in the name of charity. The sophomore moment happened on the Saturday night, when I managed to snaffle a pigs

trotter from a pig roast, poked it out from under my sleeve to create a Jeremy Beadle esque trotter hand and proceeded to put my arm round my good friend Alice for a cuddle. She was taken aback by my kindness, not noticing the appendage, until she felt said trotter running through her hair. Needless to say, everyone was in hysterics. Apart from Alice who did a scream and told me off for being a child. On the Saturday I managed seven free meals. Not bad. But very bad in ethos. Dan told me on Sunday I was starting to look like a fat John Travolta. But shorter. And less able to fly a plane. Or dance.



Dan had got himself a bona fide groupie, and she managed to get all three of us into the V.I.P area. She gave us this golden band thingie and there we were, at the bar in the middle of a load of winnebagoes looking at famous people. I had just bought myself a remarkable fur tunic that I thought made me look like Link from The Legend Of Zelda, and with this new found confidence I casually ambled around poking people and trying to get involved with something. After a brief chat with the Cooper Temple Clause and Edith Bowman I found myself being dragged to a random party with Har Mar Superstar and bloody Junior Senior. Dan had disappeared off with that girl, but I was happy to be alive, free and fanciful.

## 28

When you put a record out it's always wise to get out and about to try and flog your wares and make some new fans and that. The album had been out for about a month now, so Janey had organised us a tour. We were to play a few gigs around the country as a headline act and then be joined by a band from New York called Mink Lungs. We hadn't heard of them, but were assured by Janey that they were great. They were alright. Kind of wacky and Pixies esq indie schmindie. So, we played a handful of gigs on our own and were then joined by Mink Lungs in Cardiff, at the Barfly. I think it's shut now. Like a lot of well known toilet circuit venues nowadays. I think the recording industry has gotten pretty tough now, with all this downloading malarky. It's always been a struggle being a relatively unknown band, but now it's virtually impossible. I think we're in a bit of a limbo at the mo'. Maybe in a few years everybody will be making money again via streaming music, but

nowadays making money as a credible musician is all a bit of a fart in the wind tunnel of hope.



Anyway, moving on from the prevailing whinge, I was personally looking forward to a couple of things. The tour was to take us to Scotland. So, i'd get to revisit the land of the thistle I so yearned for. The other thing was that we were going to be playing Camden Palace, which was massive and scary and lovely. An old theatre, Camden Palace (now called Koko) has a capacity of 1500 and has seen the likes of Prince and Madonna perform on it's stage.

I'll start with the Camden Palace gig, seeing as though it came first.

We were on at Midnight, as it was a Saturday night clubnight we were playing, and we were indeed the only band of the night. As per usual we had to go and loosen ourselves up a bit, so we all headed up Camden high street after soundcheck to go and hang out with Simon Williams at The Dublin Castle. I think it must've been a Fierce Panda night or something. Anyway, after a few beers ( I think we had a four pint rule that night) and a bit of banter with Swilliams (Alex - "why did you have to go and discover Coldplay, Simon? You've ruined indie music forever, you bastard") we ambled back down to Camden Palace to go and get ready before we went on. It was ten thirty-ish when we got there and there was a queue to get in, going right round the side of the building. It was a bit overwhelming, but hey, maybe we would be in for a good night. The venue was rammed. 1500 people all packed in like sardines. I think at that point nerves started to kick in a bit, so we all scuttled backstage to go and have a drink and a lie down.

It was midnight and time to go on, and on we went. We liked to open with the punky and thrashy 'Don't Worry', which always got rid of any pre gig jitters and set the tone nicely for the evening. Now, one thing I was always a bit disappointed with at our gigs is that we never seemed to have anyone moshing down the front. We weren't metal enough maybe, and all the people that liked us were chin stroking indie kids. However, that night at Camden Palace was different. We had a proper mosh pit. All these kids were going mental, doing fake scrapping and all that. It was weird. I kept on wanting to play the songs harder, to give them what they really wanted, but it wasn't really possible. So I just mainly played with my back to the audience. I remember Dan, not being quite his usual self too. He looked nervous for once and didn't much prowl the stage so much, like the deranged sexy toilet brush he had so made his own. I seem to remember just trying to be the band that the audience wanted – heavier and more straightforward. But we weren't that. I mean, we were very very noisy, in a Sonic Youth/Idlewild sort of a way, but we were no Limp Bizkit. Which is what the audience wanted I reckon. Nonetheless we had still gotten half way through our set without anything bugging up, which was novel. Then came our single – S.P.A.C.E. Even though we all hated playing it, it was our catchiest track, and the one everyone remembered after gigs. It has this big build up at the start which launches us into a heavy instrumental pre chorus.

So there we were building up the energy, just about to go into the big, bombastic heavy bit,

where hopefully the whole venue goes bonkers and then we go into the bit where it goes mad, and Nath has brain freeze and starts playing a completely different drum beat to the song. Me and Al look at each other and this tacit agreement travels across the stage – we both just put our heads down and go into super distorted, dissonance mode, plastering over the gaping hole that had previously threatened to engulf us. Ah, thank god for Thurston Moore and his self indulgent influence on our young hearts. We got away with it. It almost sounded like it was meant. But the pressure and oddness of the occasion bore down on us as we played on. During our last song Drone, I was furiously riffing away like a madman when I heard this banging coming from the other side of the stage. Alex had had enough and clearly felt the same way as I. He was killing two birds with one stone. One bird was giving the audience what they wanted. Tother was venting his frustration. After Alex had finished smashing his bass up, I ambled the few miles or so it was across to the other side of the stage and picked up the flotsam and jetsom to use as a violin bow on my guitar. After prancing around midstage wielding my weapon of noise in front of the enraptured 1500 or so for a few minutes, I hear Nath give up and walk off, leaving the stage drenched in a wall of feedback and chaos. Dan is led on the floor like a discarded twiglet. Bits of Al's bass are littered around the stage. I chuck my Telecaster on the floor and join the others backstage, feedback ringing around the venue. Nath is pissed off. He knows he fucked up. Al looks dejected. Our new agent Steve Zapp thought it was great. But he didn't know us well enough to know the songs.

After a few drinks backstage we head into the lobby to try and sell some albums. We sell a few which is nice and some girls come up to us. I take one of them round the back for a fumble. It's odd getting groupies, but it did happen from time to time, (the most memorable time being involved in a game of post-gig strip snap with a two bit glamour model) so it would have been rude and unwise to turn down the experience. YOLO.

We wake up in the morning and have realised we have left 50 albums, my amp and pedal board (second time I had left it at a gig) and some T-Shirts behind at the venue. I think that maybe we had got a bit too drunk. We managed to get back everything but the albums. So we owed Fierce Panda £200 for losing them. Grate news. Janey was not happy. I think she told us to sort our drinking and attitudes out. We told her to bugger off. Probably.

## 29

And off to bonny Scotland we went. First stop Glasgow King Tuts. I enjoyed playing at King Tuts because Dominic Diamond from Gamesmaster was in attendance and we had a proper nosh up before the gig, courtesy of the venue. Usually we'd be given a few beers and a pizza if we were lucky, but not this time. We had a hearty 3 course meal. I particularly enjoyed the French onion soup starter.

Aberdeen was next. It was strange to think that only a few days before we were in London. And now we were in the 'Granite city'. And boy was it grey. We had a little walk out to the sea front and looked across the bleak North sea. Alex and our mate James, who had volunteered to drive us about for a week whilst on his gap year had a bit of rough n tumble, in the way only was posh boys can - "I'll get you Common, you bastard! Yeah, whatever Crocker". You know, that sort of thing. That was the thing with all of Al's mates. They all called each other by their surnames. Serious stuff.

It was a Sunday. And I don't think the gig had been promoted in any way. Three people turned up. Basically we had driven (walked) a hundred thousand miles for pretty much no gain. Cruel considering we had played in front of 1500 people only a few days before. Character building stuff was this band malarky. Later on after the gig, James decided to jump off the top of the van in some sort of act of drunken male bravado, thus fracturing his foot. This basically meant Nath had to be driver again, which he was not even remotely happy about. He'd driven to pretty much every gig and was always the most sober one. Anyway, regardless of the pratfalls, we had a larf in Scotland and then in the morning, after sleeping in the van for the sixth or seventh night on the trot, Nath took controls of the van again and off we went, back down to Manchester for the next gig.

The tour ended in London at The Water Rats in Kings Cross. We were playing with The Cribs, who were starting to cause quite a stir. Dan's groupie from Glastonbury turned up asking us for free entry but I don't think Dan really liked her, so he refused her, she got angry, had a shout at us because she'd got us into the V.I.P thingy and then turned and scuttled away. The gig was great. We were flipping fantastic. Afterwards Bruce Gilbert, the guitarist from Post-Punk legends Wire bought an album off us and told us he thought we were ace. We were all quite happy with that. We were happier to hear that an A+R man from Beggars Banquet had come down and was very impressed.

### 30

Our booking agent Steve Zapp had managed to get us a couple of really very decent gigs. The first was supporting Kasabian at The Louisiana in Bristol, which we couldn't do because Nath couldn't get time off work. The second was with The Raveonettes and it was up in sunny Middlesbrough. Another five hour trek oop north for a gig.

Nath had managed to get the afternoon off work, so we left Stroud mid afternoon to give us plenty of time. The venue was great. It lived up to it's name 'The Empire'.

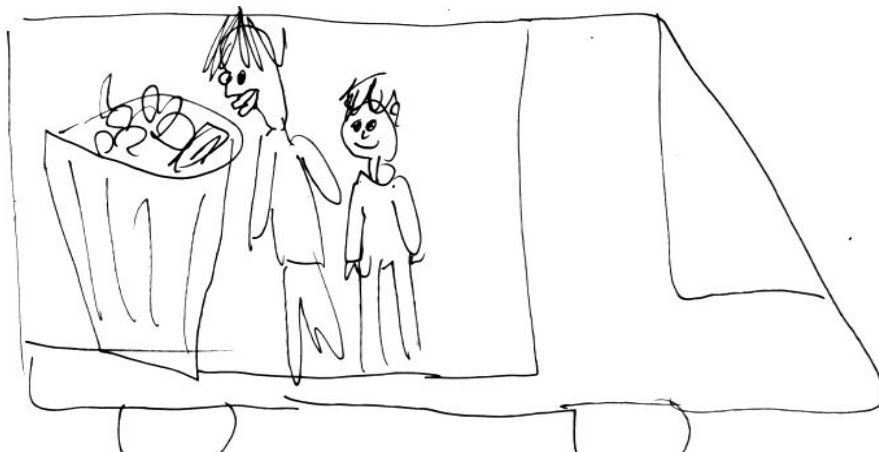
Like I said, we were playing with Danish duo 'The Raveonettes. They had their own dressing room with a rider of a variety of hams and cheeses, whilst we had our own suite, with three packets of crisps each. This just didn't seem fair, considering we were poor and hungry and they were, if not rich, then at least satisfied with their lot, seeing as tho' they hadn't touched their makeshift delicatesson. So we played our set, larked around the venue selling our albums and then when they were on, helped ourselves to their food.

Eventually we got acquainted and they asked us to join them on their tourbus. Sune, didn't really speak to us, as he was more interested in his book, but Sharin Foo was good mush. She gave me a bottle of red and told us we could help ourselves to their rider, so we got our dustbin that lived in the back of the van, cleared it of rubbish and filled it with all of their tasty foodstuffs. We literally had a dustbin full of food.

It was time to leave to go home, as it was around one in the morning and the venue had shut, so we bid fairwell to Sharin and Sune and ambled back to the van, to find that we had locked the keys in it. There was nothing else to do but smash a window to retrieve them. Bear in mind it was a hired van, so there would be a nice bill for that calamity. Eventually we set off back home. And then we ran out of petrol. We pulled over onto the hard shoulder and Nath, Al and James set off to go and find a service station. It was two in the morning and rather chilly. We were near Leeds. Dan and I stayed behind with the van and kept warm by eating our body weight in ham and cheese. I got a bit asthmatic from



eating too much, but luckily I had an inhaler on me. A few hours later the other three turn up with fuel and we're on our way again. We get back to Stroud at seven and go straight to the car boot sale where Al's girlfriend Sarah is. I buy a ridiculous, ill fitting leather biker's jacket, complete with tassles. At eight in the morning I go back home and rest my head for a few hours. I have work at one.



### 31

Those gigs ended and a few weeks passed. We all went back to Stroud to recover and to write some new stuff. It wasn't going well. I think Al had started to distance himself a bit from the band. I'm not sure his heart was really in it anymore, and he'd started to become a bit contrary. He was all loved up with his girlfriend Sarah, had had enough of touring and wanted to go and make art again. Anyway, Al told us he didn't want to do it anymore. Maybe he wanted to tell us now, before anything else was to happen. Who knows. But we were all pretty pissed off, as we thought he was being ridiculously selfish. But if that was what he wanted, then so be it. So in the end, Alex agreed to fill in for a bit until we found another bassist, as we had few decent gigs coming up, and he didn't want to let us down completely.

### 32

A few months passed and during this period I finally got to meet my heroes. Janey had managed to get us VIP tickets for a Blur gig at The Coronet in Elephant and Castle, so after the gig we all piled backstage to the free bar and got very drunk. I had a chat with Damon, where he managed to unleash the old cliché "never give up", and I also poked Alex James in the chest to get his attention. He looked down on me and made polite conversation. I also spoke to Dave briefly. Because Graham had left the band and was absent, I took his place and decided to lie on the floor like a human doormat, just like him when he was at student parties at Goldsmiths. Oh to be young again.

I also got to meet Graham at one of his solo shows at The Fleece in Bristol, once again backstage. I told him that he was the reason I started playing guitar, in typical fan boy fashion and he gave me his plectrum. I was pleased by his response. It made me feel special for at least thirty seconds.

Back to Le Neon. Nath had managed to find us a replacement for Al. So this kid called Martin turned up for practice one evening, at our new jamming place on the top floor of Stroud congregational church. My first impressions of Martin were that he just didn't look right for us, and that he was very pleasant. Basically, he idolised Marilyn Manson and looked like a cross between David Beckham and Dolph Lundgren. You know Dolph. He played that rock hard Russian boxer in Rocky four. Except Rocky was harder. Like a piece of Iron. Anyway, so Martin was pretty good at playing, but he was too neat. And he didn't make a racket like Al. But he was willing, and you know, we had a bassist again.



It was time to gig again, with Neon mark III. Us and bassists just didn't seem to work for very long did we. Janey had got us a few gigs up and down the country, to continue to promote Luss. The Charlotte in Leicester was the first stop. And it didn't go well. We soundchecked and went back to the van for our evening meal of value baked beans, bread and beer, and then Martin told us he couldn't play the gig because he was feeling sick. I remember feeling very fucking angry and thinking he was being a pussy, but that was that. To be fair, later on we found out that he had a perforated ear drum, brought on going to a Marilyn Manson gig and exacerbated by playing with us. We were a loud band, I have to say. Every so often, at rehearsals, it would be so loud, I would feel as though my head was literally on the floor, as the sheer volume of it all distorted my balance. So I could understand why. But I still didn't feel sorry for him. Anyway, we played the gig as a three piece, and to be honest, it was pretty nuts. The five or six people in the audience witnessed us play like banshees and thought we were fantastic, and the promoter asked us to come to the local rock club with him after the show. Martin was in the van asleep, so we left him to dream of stadium rock metal shows and headed off to the club. It was an interesting night. Dan made off with some girlie back to her halls of residence, but not before we had a bit of fun taking the piss out of our ex-bassist Matt (Remember him? Purton Matt – the one that liked Deftones), who was randomly at the club because he was

at Uni' in Leicester doing his Economics degree. There must be some sort of irony there in that there we both were following our dreams, except his choice was almost definitely the more successful of the two at that moment, as our band and dreams were really starting to fall apart at the seams. As were our stinking, piss stained jeans.

We did another gig in London, where all of Martin's family came down to watch their relative play in his cool signed rock band. We were shit. There was no energy. It was all wrong. And I had a tantrum four songs in and threw my guitar ten metres across the room, where it landed with a smash in and amongst a load of equipment, before storming out of the venue in a sulk. The band carried on playing without me for a while and then stopped. Martin came outside and I told him that it was shit with him in it. And then I apologised, because it was a bit harsh of me to say so. But it was shit with him in it. Or rather, it was shit without Alex in it. It just didn't work without Al.

We went back to Stroud and Martin left the band. I made my peace with him, and he accepted that my nastiness was a product of my mental state. I was a mess. Once again. My dreams were in tatters. The last four or five years of hard work from me, Dan and Nath, not to mention Alex, was clearly never going to go any further, at least not until we had made an attempt to sort stuff out.

### 35

To keep our moral up, we jammed as a bass-less three piece for a few months, and wrote some more stuff. Dan got his keyboards out, to help fill out the sound a bit, and we decided to try and change direction. Already the musical times were starting to change, and we could see that there was a neo-prog movement starting to appear, with all the bands like Mars Volta and The Cooper Temple Clause starting to cause a stir. So that was the direction we took. Gone were the throwaway, noisy punk songs and in came actual guitar widdling and swirling, swathes of hammond organ. I thought we had something rather unique, as our new songs seemed to straddle the line between punk, prog rock, two tone and post punk. We even had a doomy waltzy one called Death of a Clown. We sent the bass-less demos down to Fierce Panda, with the premise of us making an ep with it all, but Simon was being more than evasive about it. I think he really liked one or two of the tracks, but he just didn't see it being viable. I can remember badgering him on the phone about it, and him saying something along the lines of "You guys are really exciting live and I really like the songs on Luss". I think what he was trying to say is that we were ruining our sound and now that the songs had changed he couldn't see them translating into something particularly exciting live. Oh and he didn't like the fact we didn't have a bassist. And that we kept falling out with everyone. Including ourselves. Basically, he didn't see us having a future. In the end, Simon came to see us at The Verge in Kentish Town, and I spoke to him in person, where he pretty much said the same thing as he did when we first met:

*"Simon, so come on, are you going to put out our EP?"*

*"Hmm, well that would be like rocket science."*

### 36

This just wouldn't do. We hadn't written these ace new songs to go to waste, so I got out my johnson, layed it on the table, and got us a gig with Seafood at the legendary 100 Club in London. We would prove to Simon that we were still ace and that the new songs were the way forwards. Only problem was that we didn't have a bassist, so I shuffled down to Al's painting studio and had a big ol' chat with him about it all. I told him that I missed him, and that we needed him and that we had a gig with Seafood at the 100 Club. And that was that. He was back in.

### 37

The Seafood gig was great. The 100 club was legendary, Al was back, the new songs with him playing on them sounded beefy and odd, we were all friends again, oh and we were playing with Seafood, who if you can remember all the way back to the initial Stroud days were the band that Jools introduced to us, to get us making decent music. There was also the Fierce Panda link. Basically it had all come full circle. Which was kind of rewarding. We played really well that night, and sold loads of albums. The funny thing is, a few weeks later, after browsing the Drowned in Sound forum, I found some people talking about that night and saying how good we were and that they had bought an album on the strength of our live show, and being disappointed because the album was 'unlistenable' in comparison to the stuff we played live. Maybe that there was proof that our new material really was as good as we thought it was. But still Simon wouldn't release it.

### 38

We hadn't played in Stroud for donkey's ears 'n' years. A long time. And we all agreed that the time was now to make our return.

There were a handful of pretty decent bands kicking around the Stroudlands at the time (early 2004), including our mate Dylan's band 'Yang' and our mate's from the recording studio Rob and Josh had put together a group called Popgang, who were great. So with us topping the bill, we organised a gig at Stroud Liberal Club. At around 100 capacity, the venue was about right for an exclusive showcase gig for Stroud's finest. Now, Fierce Panda are famed for their puns. All of their compilations albums and ep's have stoopid titles such as 'Cry me a Liver' and 'Mosh and Go'.



So, as a homage to the Panda people we titled our gig 'Liberal Clubbing'. We got our web designer 'The Dark Lord' to create a super duper poster and bob's your uncle (my uncle is called Alec) we had created a top draw event. Tickets were priced at a measly £3 and it sold out within a few days. People were literally begging to get in on the night. It was great. Flippin' great. Dan kept shouting "We're back!" at the crowd whilst we all (apparently) flailed about like wheat or barley in a windy, Wiltshire field.

Local journalist and poet Adam Horovitz described the night as thus:

### ***Stroud News & Journal***

***Le Neon + Popgang + Yang  
Liberal Club, Stroud,  
Willow Court, Beeches Green, Stroud. GL5 4BJ***

### ***Thrilling rock gig***

*Stroud Liberal Club was reeling on Saturday under an almighty sonic assault from three heavy, heavy rock bands.*

*Not since the Stroud-rock glory days of The Things at The Marshall Rooms have so many had so much fun.*

*Yang, playing only their second gig, built up an extraordinarily tight wall of noise out of which delicious melodies shimmered. Next up were Popgang, a poppy yin to Yang's yang. Dark-Hearted. thrilling eighties revivalists to a man, Popgang played a taut and tender set that paved the way nicely for Le Neon's homecoming gig. Le Neon have spent the last couple of years touring, and it shows. At times during their set the front rows of the audience were nothing but hair, waving like it was corn being threshed. Thrilling and invigorating.*

*March 2004 - Adam Horovitz*

## **39**

It was great coming back and it all going to plan and it being a success. So we let that go to our heads, and so decided to put on another Stroud gig, at the biggest venue in town – The Subscription Rooms. It was a failure. After getting their fix a month or so before, the people of Stroud struggled to summon up enough courage to come and support us in force like they did at the Liberal Club, and so only about fifty people came. Bear in mind that the venue capacity was around 500 and the cost of hire of the venue was relative to that. So we lost a fair amount of money and our ego's deflated overnight. Dan and I had started to argue a lot too, because I wanted to go back to making noisy stuff again, with him squarking all over everything, whilst he wanted to make proper pop music in the vein of The Specials and The Kinks. Me, Nath and Al had also started to jam without Dan, as a largely instrumental side project called The Forest Nightmare, which I think marked a tacit agreement that Le Neon was over.

It all came to a head at our friend Kathleen's house one night, and Dan told us he was going to move to London. It was all quite sad really, because Dan and I had been proper best buds, and had shared most of the last five years together. Me and Nath said some pretty horrible things to Dan, which was kind of needless, but in the end, frustrations had got to all of us. I remember once a few months before we broke up, trying to punch Nath in the back of the van, over a row over a sleeping bag. Nath being a big, meaty kind of lad deflected me and told me to shut up. I was a bit drunk I think. In fact, the morning after was particularly memorable in that we were driving through the pretty Cotswold village of Painswick on the way back from sleeping in Cheltenham's centre car park after a night out (hence sleeping bag argument), when I decided I needed to do a sick. Basically, it was eight in the morning and all the posh housewives were taking their kids to school, when Nath quickly pulled over and I jumped out of the van like a tramp member of the A-Team and proceeded to vomit all over the gloriously green grass in front of said housewives and schoolchildren. It was the epitome of sartorial elegance. All encapsulated in one swift move from van to verge. Maybe I was just trying to show the Painswick locals that I was the nation's number one Bleurgh fan.



But anyway, back to the break up of Le Neon. So Dan was off to London, whilst us three agreed to stay in Stroud and continue on with doing Forest Nightmare stuff. The blow of Le Neon splitting up was softened by the excitement of what we were doing with the new project, but it was crap that it all ended so badly. But that's bands for you. Ego's tend to get burst in such scenarios. All bands have a shelf life, and ours at around the five year mark was pretty good. And anyway, to be fair, we'd achieved some rather amazing things, and had some great experiences together.

Dan continued to write solo stuff and found sanctuary (and a new band) in London, and like I said, I was happy fronting The Forest Nightmare and we went on to release a couple of ep's on my own Pow Pow Pow label and do a couple of gigs.

Here's a review by James S of Sounds XP of our first EP:

*There are reasons to be terrified of this Nightmare before you even begin. The words started by accident at an open-mic art event in Stroud are enough to strike fear into the heart of any human, but when you then read of the band's approach to experimenting with loose song structure, you can only fear the worst. Add song titles like I Am King (A Forest Nightmare) Including The Tale Of Simian and Lake Of The Hydra's Head and you have to be afraid. Very afraid.*

*Like all good horror though, the anticipation is scarier than the actuality. Whilst the titles suggest prog-rock, the reality proves to be grinding swirls of post-rock, full of menace and foreboding to make up for their lack of direction or purpose. The vocals are thankfully brief throughout, which just about alleviates how awful they are. Monotone singing, shouting and narration all appear in the first two songs alone and the less said about the 'hilarious' stoned student rendition of Syd Barrett's The Gnome, the better. Despite the plethora of minuses, this EP is surprisingly listenable overall, despite the nagging feeling that the band didn't really want it to be.*

We were all really proud of that first ep, and even that captured a particularly funny memory – 'The Gnome' featured my housemate Paul, who at weekends used to wake me up at ten in the morning by knocking on my bedroom door clutching a box of wine. He was a bit of a boozehound was ol' Paul. But we loved him. We called him 'Paul, the son of Dionysus'. Anyway, one of those mornings ended up with me, Al and Paul doing a dictaphone recording of Pink Floyd's 'The Gnome'. Al had slept on my bedroom floor the previous night after a late night in Stroud, and you can hear him laughing constantly throughout. It makes me laugh and smile to myself, even to this day. Good times.



However the good times very quickly turned into the bad times. As I said, I was living in a shared house, and I got on with all my housemates, including this Canadian girl that lived in the flat below. To cut a long story short, me and her went to a party one night, and came back to drink wine in my room. I think she'd had a bit of ecstasy and got all frisky and started getting naked. That was fine by me, 'cos although she was sort of seeing someone I had no desire to touch, just watch in amusement. So there I am watching this girl flouncing around when all of a sudden the window next to my head smashes (i'm on the ground floor). It's her 'boyfriend', and he's been peeping through the window. I get up to let him in and tell him that i'm not doing owt and that she's just being silly. He however gets the wrong end of the stick (he is high on Cocaine) and starts raining punches on me and tries to fling me head first down the stairs. Luckily I grab hold of the banister and after a while he buggers off, not before spraying blood from his gashed wrist that he cut on my window, all over the house. I'm all shook up, but i'm not Elvis, i'm Adam Peter James Crosland and my head hurts a bit, so the girl calls an ambulance to come and check me for concussion. They give me the all clear and in the morning my mum comes over from Purton and demands that I come back to live with her again. And that's what I do. The lucid neon dream is over in a cliched hail of blood, sweat and tears. But hey, it was all good fun while it lasted. I think.



The end

**Adam Crosland is an artist, musician and gardener.**

Adam currently lives in Purton, Wiltshire, with his girlfriend Laura, where together they look after their pigs, sheep and chickens and grow lots of plants.

In 2004 Adam's friend Matt De Pulford took this picture at Camber Sands, to be used if Adam ever got round to writing a book. So Adam thought he better use said picture, because he likes to think it makes him look like a real author.



More about Adam can be found at [www.adamcrosland.com](http://www.adamcrosland.com)

