

review

Shabba Ranks

Brixton Academy, Oct 30

★★★★★

MORE than 13 years since Shabba Ranks' last UK performance and after weeks of hearing Ting-a-Ling on radios across London, the day arrives to see the self-proclaimed "Emperor" himself. Finally, after three hours of support acts with fans increasingly restless, the Academy goes dark and... bang! Fireworks explode on stage and Shabba strides forward, dressed head-to-toe in black.

Backed by the Ruff Cut band, the king of 90s dancehall launches into some of his most sexually charged songs, including Winey Winey, Wicked In A Bed and Love P****y Bad. The crowd is going suitably mad, shouting and screaming as the reggae icon leaps across the stage with his famous low-wind.

Although Chaka Demus & Pliers couldn't make it, the blitz of guest duets is impressive, starting with Mykal Rose. He goes straight into Shine Eye Gal, followed by Shoot Out, which has the academy erupting with hands in the air.

The stunning Selena Serrano slinks on to sing Mr Loverman and gets a full dose of Shabba love as they dance out the track. Maxi Priest is greeted with hugs from Shabba and the whole affair is starting to feel like a family reunion.

The closing section sees him perform Trailer Load Of Girls, accompanied by a score of dancing ladies moving to "big bad dutty stinkin Shabba's" flow.

Finally, the solo Shabba performs Ting-a-Ling and the audience bogle out to the Emperor's awesome return.

Rob Logan & Valroy Simpson

pulsepicks

ON THE STEREO: The Link Quartet. Funk-soaked, impossibly groovy, Hammond-driven Italian outfit. One of their songs is called Italian Playboys, which is what you feel like listening to it

ON THE DVD PLAYER: Hidden (Caché). Michael Haneke, director of Palme d'Or-winning The White Ribbon, is everywhere at the moment, making it the perfect time to revisit this befuddling, deeply unsettling thriller

ON THE MIND: So horse-riding is statistically more dangerous than ecstasy? Expect to see ravers galloping around the countryside in the near future

ON THE AGENDA: Turning up to the Steve Martin gig in a bathrobe, carrying a chair, ashtray, remote control, lamp...

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contact Pulse at 2-4 Leigham Court Road, Streatham, SW16 2PD, on 020 8710 6436 or email pulse@sp.co.uk www.twitter.com/pulseslp

preview

Steve Martin and his banjo

Steve Martin

Royal Festival Hall, Nov 9

WHETHER it's for his turns on Saturday Night Live, the landmarks of his early Hollywood career (The Jerk etc) or the increasingly dubious family movies (Cheaper By The Dozen) that have been his bread and

butter of late, chances are you know Steve Martin as a comedy actor.

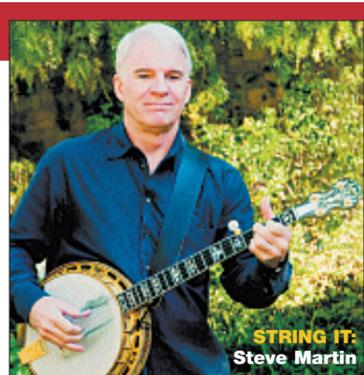
Not, for instance, as a Grammy Award-winning bluegrass banjo player. But he is just that. And as the Grammy might suggest he's pretty good at it too, being something of a master of the difficult five-fingered playing style known as clawhammer.

Having previously worked with the likes of Earl Scruggs, Vince Gill

and John McEuen, Martin is now bringing his acclaimed bluegrass band Steep Canyon Rangers here for their first UK performance.

They will be playing tracks from their acclaimed new album The Crow: Songs for the Five-String Banjo.

● Royal Festival Hall, Southbank Centre, Belvedere Road SE1 8XX. 7.30pm. £25-£55. Visit www.southbankcentre.co.uk or call 0871 663 2500 to book.



STRING IT: Steve Martin

preview

Taste of the new talent

OneTaste Festival

The Bedford, Sunday

IN AN ideal world, people in search of the next big thing would look to OneTaste before they turned to NME or X-Factor. Why? Because herein lies one of the capital's greatest talent-spotting, career-boosting party factories; a bold, busy and unreservedly brilliant music and spoken word collective that has helped to launch the likes of Portico Quartet, Newton Faulkner, Little Dragon, Tawiah, Scroobius Pip, Jamie Woon, Polar Bear, Jono McCleery, Wallis Bird, Beth Rowley... need we go on?

Of course, our world is far from ideal and it remains the case that OneTaste is still below the radar of the wider public – even as its artists are making waves out in the mainstream.

But there's no use bemoaning such an injustice, particularly when the underground status is what keeps the fantastic OneTaste shows in intimate venues and gives those in the know the chance to watch London's most furiously talented rising stars without queuing five-deep at the bar. Happy days indeed.

If you've never caught a OneTaste show, now is the time to start. If you've been before you'll know this is the one not to miss.

The annual all-day festival is when

the collective really pushes the boat out, celebrating all the gigs and festival appearances of the past year in true razor-sharp style – over three floors and five stages.

This year's Balham get-together features man-of-the-moment Newton Faulkner and 2009 festival favourites The Correspondents, plus Laura Dockrill, Jono McCleery, Bridgette Amofah, Laura J Martin, Speakers Corner Quartet, Parkbench Poet, Sound of Rum (fronted by Kate Tempest), David Goo, Gabby Young & Other Animals and 35 other acts, not to mention workshops, Q&As, film screenings and talks.

And there's even more reason to celebrate this year, as Monday sees the release of the collective's first major compilation album (imaginatively titled OneTaste Compilation Volume 1). Included will be 14 tracks from some of OneTaste's most celebrated artists, including The Hat, Inua Ellams, Little Dragon and Gideon Conn. The sublime Portico Quartet have given unreleased track Midnite Delite exclusively for the compilation, which will also feature part 1 of a story by Polar Bear that will span the next three compilations.

It's not an ideal world, but OneTaste goes some way to making up for it.

● The Bedford, Bedford Hill, Balham SW12 9HD. 1pm to midnight. £10 advance, £12 on the door. Visit www.onetaste.co.uk for bookings and details.

BACKSTAGE PALS: OneTaste producer Dannii Evans with Newton Faulkner and his sister Lottie



albumreviews

Seasick Steve

Man From Another Time

★★★★★

BLUESMAN Steve Gene Wold is only on his fourth album but clearly has several decades of wisdom to share.

His fashionable charm springs from an earthy soul and effortless ability to sing rich tunes with only a few chords and an authentic croaking voice.

The scabrous title track has these elements plus a healthy amount of ire aimed at Steve's critics.

The style hasn't changed – you get more songs about his history, loves and straightforward survival.



My Home is a metaphysically wan ditty about longing for a woman because she's where his heart is. It's typically honest, verging on maudlin but never anything less than uplifting.

MFAT has a little more anger than the last record and surpasses its scope and freshness. Happy (To Have a Job) is the perfect proof.

This time around your correspondent is happy to be called a Seasick Steve fan of great conviction.

Michael Buble

Crazy Love

★★★★★

SAY what you like about big band boy scout Buble – he has a priceless, almost timeless voice as reassuring as Christmas.

It is as superficially enticing as an unbitten stalk of Kit-Kat – so smooth and sweetly measured.

Really it's an amazing thing even if it seems wasted on the 50s standards he's being marketed to sing.

His latest sees him cover a lot of songs about difficult relationships. Van Morrison's 1970 track gives the album its title and Buble does it well – if you like a Van the Man classic sounding like Sinatra. There's a raft of classic songs performed here with little divergence from the easy listening handbook. Many, many dads will find this in their Christmas stocking.

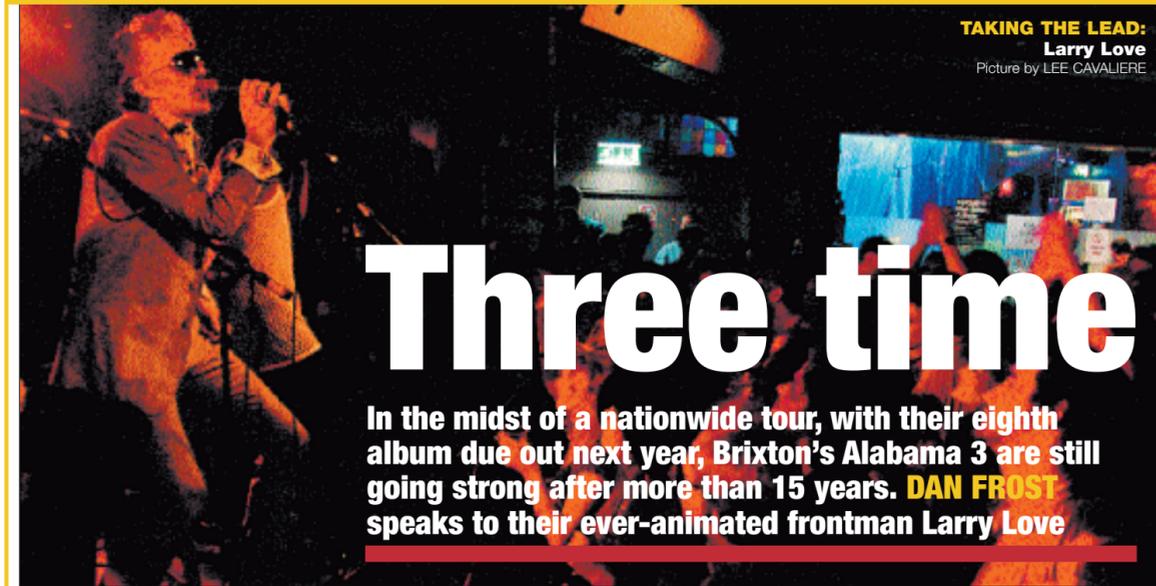
So there's the voice, which is peerless in its clarity and purpose – but what else is there?

With more money, fans and success than any sane man could want, what else does he need?



with Gareth Dorrian

interview



TAKING THE LEAD: Larry Love
Picture by LEE CAVALIERE

Three time

In the midst of a nationwide tour, with their eighth album due out next year, Brixton's Alabama 3 are still going strong after more than 15 years. DAN FROST speaks to their ever-animated frontman Larry Love

ALABAMA 3 are still most famous for penning Woke Up This Morning, the dark and caustic theme tune to The Sopranos.

But what are the Brixton band most notorious for? Not the fact that they've built a lengthy career on an audacious combination of country music, acid house, blues, rock and whatever else – as impressive as that is – but for the hard-living hedonism that seems to characterise life on and off the stage.

It's this that lends their music such a fearless sense of excitement – no wonder Irvine Welsh is a fan when each of their seven (soon to be eight) studio albums sounds like it's been marinated in Hunter S Thompson's Las Vegas travel bag.

And like any good frontman, Larry Love personifies the image with aplomb. Speaking to me ahead of the band's current UK tour, he trades in a quick-fire combination of shrewd social, political and musical insight, proverbs and hilarious anecdotes, all delivered in a croaking Welsh patter that sounds as weather-beaten as a fisherman's fingers.

As for his manner, he is instantly personable, thoroughly down-to-earth and hugely entertaining. The truth is, Larry (real name Rob Spragg) is a wise and funny guy who can talk about himself far more interestingly than I ever could. So that's what you've got: behold the wit and wisdom of Larry Love...

On a shift in the band's sound: "We've got loads of guests on the new album. We've got Shane MacGowan, Johnny Borrell, Huey [Morgan] from Fun Lovin' Criminals, Anjelica Huston, a load of these dubstep rappers, assorted lunatics and everyone's really up for it. I've been listening to loads of dubstep, so I'm gonna twist

all that in there with slide guitar and shit.

"I think we need a radical overhaul of our electronica. I love acid house but I've been listening to lots of pirate radio stations and there's some f***ing shit-hot kids out there doing great weird shit.

"If I can mix acid house with country and western, why can't I mix dubstep with country and western? I've got these f***ing little MCs, like 17-year-olds from f***ing East Ham, who are like, 'All right bruv', who have been into the studio. They're all really intrigued by us like, 'Who are all these blues f***ers? Who's that old bastard in the corner with sunglasses on, sniffing?'"

On mixing blues and country with dance music: "I don't see it as being very radical. I know on paper it looks f***ing ridiculous, but I felt that with Detroit techno in the mid 80s, that it had a direct lineage to blues music, because it's a four to the four stomp, and it's about the energy there, people staying up all night and getting f***ed.

"Before Moby did that Play album I was doing instrumental stuff, mixing Alan Lomax blues records and gospel stuff over techno, and it seemed to work. Rather than using samples as Moby did, we kind of developed a band around that, which is a lot more difficult."

On the Alabama 3 fanbase: "It's f***ing twisted. Mark Lemar asked us, 'So who exactly are the Alabama 3 fanbase?'. I said, 'Drug dealers and their families', which covers most camps basically. That was our problem with Sony Records and Geffen Records and the reason we haven't sold that many records: no one can isolate our demographic.

"But we're positive about that. We can raise our own revenue and enjoy the fact that we've got such a wide fanbase. But it's still a bit twisted to

look out into the crowd and see all these hells angels next to demure lesbian couples next to 14 ravers guerning their faces off on Es."

On Woke Up This Morning and the fact that, as they put it, "the song bought someone a swimming pool but it wasn't any of us":

"It was a classic case of band signs contract under auspices of naive manager. You've got to bear in mind that when we were first approached to do it, I remember the call coming through – 'There's this small cable channel in New York' – you just sign off on it thinking nothing of it, then six months later all my mates are like, 'f***ing hell Rob it's f***ing Sopranos all over the f***ing place'. There was a cock-up on the original deal that meant we didn't get a credit on the show or anything. Even on The Sopranos website there were rumours going around that Leonard Cohen wrote the song, which I don't mind at all. That's a f***ing compliment."

On their hedonistic reputation: "I hate all the cliches of 'I've gotta take heroin so I can play guitar like Keith Richards', but I know a certain derangement of the senses... you think the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.

"It's a two-way relationship with your audience if you're in a rock'n'roll band. You have to live to a vicarious level for your fans. I'm not into full-on hedonism or people losing the plot, but I think you have to be a bit crazy to do the f***ing job.

"It's about authenticity. We sing about what it says on the tin. But I like to think we put across both the pros and cons of the hedonistic lifestyle."

● Alabama 3 play the Kentish Town Forum on November 10. New album Revolver Soul is due out in March next year. Visit www.alabama3.co.uk for more.

review

Jack Peñate

The Fridge, Oct 29

★★★★★

WHO better than local lad Jack Peñate to oversee The Fridge's return to live music after decades as a dance-orientated nightclub?

"This is the first gig here for 15 years," said the exuberant Blackheath-born singer-songwriter, touched by the local significance of the moment and the adoration of his home support. As expected, the venue was positively bulging, literally to you'll-miss-a-good-chunk-of-the-show-if-you-want-a-drink proportions. Image-wise Peñate is low-key sibling to the ramshackle, less polished Jamie T, and tongue-in-cheek Lily Allen. Musically he owes a large debt to the UK's 80s music scene.

Latest single Pull My Heart Away is the pure pop of The Cure, with Peñate offering a cracked Robert Smith vocal. And one of the evening's standout tracks, Torn On The Platform – complete with beautifully controlled mid-song pause before letting the audience have it – brought to mind the jaunty beats of Madness. One even expected Suggs to interject with "My girl's mad at me..."

The opening chimes of brilliant set-closer Be The One hit home like The Happy Mondays or Screamedelica-era Primal Scream, before he launched into a vocal mix of The Cure with the robust soulfulness of Paul Weller's Style Council; the pure energy of the performance crowned by some unnecessary but undoubtedly crowd-pleasing spitting.

Although he gives everything in performance, Peñate currently lacks the depth of songs to really shine. The prolonged encore of Tonight's Today was a run-of-the-mill sing-along, and opens Everything Is New and Spit At Stars got the crowd going but were easily forgotten.

Another disappointment was the lighting, which cast the band in shadow. Peñate is a charismatic performer and it would have been better had he been clearly visible.

Simon Riches

preview

World Unknown

Secret Brixton location, tonight

THE first World Unknown was a rammed, roadblock of a party with no advance publicity. Which is a good sign of a top-drawer night and that their second will be even more banging.

The Brixton location has been a tightly kept secret (when we say "secret" we mean "amusing marketing play"), with eager ravers having to sign up via email to get the address.

As for the music, expect a nostalgia-drenched journey through the cream of 80s dance music, taking in Belgian new beat, acid house, cold wave, synth-pop.

● £5 before midnight, £7 after. 11pm-5am. Email mail@worldunknown.co.uk for the secret location.

previews

Greasy Lips

Dirty South & Jamm, tonight and tomorrow

WITH Oasis off the books Creation Records boss Alan McGee launches a club night at two top venues.

The event will feature up-and-coming bands chosen by McGee and his event partner Jamie Kelly. McGee will also be on hand for a notoriously eclectic DJ set.

● Dirty South, 162 Lee High Road, Lewisham SE13. £8. 8pm-2am. Visit www.dirtysouthlondon.com or call 020 8852 1267. Jamm, 261 Brixton Road, Brixton SW9. Visit www.brixtonjamm.org or call 020 7274 5537.

Love Fever

Corsica Studios, tomorrow

AFTER a sizzling summer at trendy East End warehouse parties, organisers of legendary disco night Love Fever have taken the wise decision to move south.

For their "most outrageous party yet" the crew are laying on balloons, disco balls, projections, artworks and roller girls.

Nicky Siano, a veteran disco DJ of Studio 54 fame heads up room one. ● Corsica Studios, 4 Elephant Road, Elephant & Castle SE17 1LB. £15. 10pm-5am. Visit www.corsicastudios.com or call 020 7703 4760.

Brass Impact

Half Moon, Sunday

FORMED more than two decades ago, Brass Impact is a 27-strong group of musicians who claim to be able to offer any kind of band for any occasion (we're assuming there are certain exceptions).

What this means for their new Sunday afternoon residency at the Half Moon remains to be seen.

The promise is of "big band swing". Quite how big and how swinging we are waiting to find out. ● The Half Moon, 10 Half Moon Lane, Herne Hill SE24. £6. 1pm-3.30pm. Visit www.halfmoonpub.co.uk or call 020 7274 2733.

James Taylor

Quartet

Hootananny, Nov 11

WITH no connection to their US namesake, the British jazz funk band are famous in their own right – not least for the Starksy And Hutch theme tune and their reputedly barnstorming live shows.

The four-piece have a whopping 20 albums under their belts and bring more than 20 years of touring experience to show that will also feature DJ Tim Keeney. ● Hootananny, 95 Effra Road, Brixton SW2. £8. 8pm-2am. Visit www.hootanannybrixton.co.uk or call 020 7737 7273.