

Up and Coming

Rock musicians tend to come in groups rather than as soloists, so today we look at five young bands and one individual singer who are making their mark in a highly competitive field.

ROCK MUSICIANS

BY DAVE FANNING

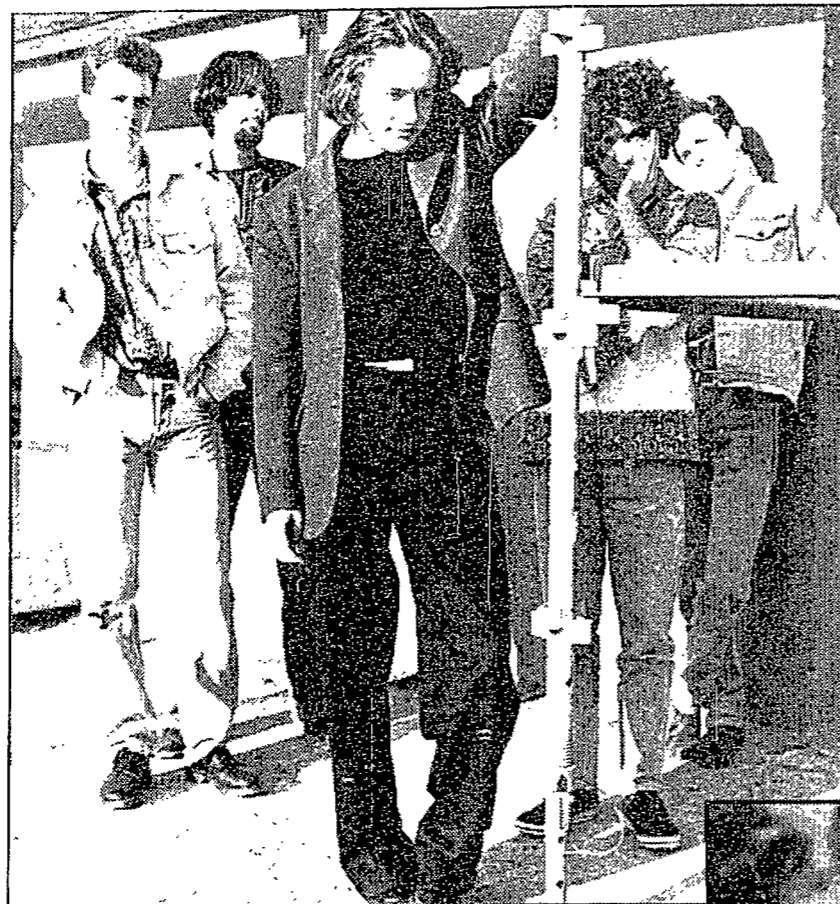


THE BLUE ANGELS

SOME bands define themselves by their playing abilities, their vocal prowess, their dress or their A & K prospects. The Blue Angels, though, can't be defined by any particular quality. They just feel right. Somehow this band has managed to get uncomfortably close to that elusive essence of rock 'n' roll, what some call "groove", what others call "suss", and what complete bores might call "audience-friendly feedback deployment". Whatever it is, The Blue Angels have it in buckets, and in the past two years they have poured it out for punters from the Baggot Inn to the Feile and back again.

Formed by the remaining members of Blue In Heaven after the departure of guitarist Kieran Kennedy to form the Black Velvet Band, The Blue Angels made their debut at the Rock Candy Club in Dublin's Grattan Pub playing alongside their friends. Before a small, select crowd singer Shane O'Neill introduced new songs and a new approach. "Shooting Star" and "Eric's Dream Boy" were instantly likeable, unpretentious, rock songs that made you want to sing along, and soon after those first gigs, crowds were flocking regularly to the New Inn to see The Blue Angels in action. It was not unusual after these gigs to see some excited punter urging Shane to "get a deal" and "conquer the world", but Shane had had enough of the A & K merry-go-round with his last band, and he preferred to cruise along on a wave of good gigs and even better vibes.

The Blue Angels have, in a sense, finally come out with the release of their two singles "Candy" and "Get It Back" on Solid Records. But they've no intention of making any premature grab for rock's glittering prizes. They're too busy trying to get the heart of rock 'n' roll. When David Bowie's *1 in Machine* did a surprise support slot at the band's recent Baggot Inn gig, The Blue Angels kept most of the capacity crowd rocking long after the Thin White Duke had departed, proving once again that The Blue Angels really do belong in rock 'n' roll.



ENGINE ALLEY

ALTHOUGH three-quarters of Engine Alley hail from Kilkenny, they took their name from a street in Dublin's Liberties. They made their debut less than two years ago and after some attention-grabbing gigs in the Underground in Dublin's Dame Street and much-praised demo and session tapes, they began to float towards the top.

Live, Cantic Williams is the front-man, who may or may not give the nod towards Lindsay Kemp-era David Bowie. At the Baggot the other week, that was the only part of their excellent live performance that was either too half-assed or too silly to work. Brian Kennealy and Eamonn Byrne take charge of the guitar and bass respectively, while behind the drumkit sits 15-year-old Emmaline Fallon-Duffy. She's a super drummer.

Last year's "Sonic Holiday" demo which incorporated a string section was produced by Pete Holiday who was a member of the Radiators From Space, the band who a decade and a half ago released that brilliant Irish punk debut "T.V. Tube Heart". Paul McGuinness saw Engine Alley play at the Baggot. He liked them and signed them to Mother Records.

The band spent most of the first six months of this year writing, rehearsing and generally organising themselves in their own little hideaway in Capel Street, which they call the Engine Room. Their debut three-song Flowerbox EP, released on CD a few weeks ago, fulfilled much of the promise/hype, containing the standout "In A Different Kind Of Way". The EP was produced by one of the world's most famous record producers, Mr Kirsty McColl - better known as Steve Lillywhite - who has twiddled knobs for many of the greats you care to mention, from the Stones to U2.

THE FRAMES

The Frames were formed last Summer and played their first proper gig in Connemara at the Clifden Country Blues Festival. Glen Hansard, formerly a member of Hank Hallhead and the Rambling Turkeys, is the band's singer and songwriter. He has a songwriting deal with Island Records thanks to the attentions of famous '60s producer Denny Cordell. This past Summer Hansard collaborated with Frames bassist John Carney to write the atmospherically-based score for "Murder In The Cathedral" in Christchurch Cathedral - where the acoustics of the venue formed an integral part of the overall and final sound of the music.

Right now Hansard is basking in the glory of the accolades being heaped upon the Alan Parker movie of Roddy Doyle's "The Commitments". Amongst other things the movie is about a bunch of young working-class Dubliners seeking a way up in the world through the music they play - and if they don't make it that's not exactly the point. In the movie Hansard plays band member and carrot-top guitarist Outspan.

At the moment Hansard is back to being a full-time Frame. The band is currently recording its debut album at Dublin's S.T.S. Studios under the expert guidance of Paul Barrett who also produced the band's debut single "The Dancer". Because that single was only released in

Ireland, it's getting a re-release in the next month or two in order to reach a wider audience. The album which would be released in February has a working title of "Another Love Song".

Katell Keinig

KATELL KEINIG has been making waves on the Irish music scene for a couple of years now. Her innovative and original songs explore the borderlands between rock, folk and blues, and Joni Mitchell comparisons pup up all the time. She was born in Brittany and moved to a Welsh valley at the age of nine. She grew up in the heady atmosphere of the

Celtic cultural revival in both countries and by the age of seven was stacking chairs and selling merchandise at the concerts of family friend Alan Stivell. She's played support to Christy Moore in Galway, to Hothouse Flowers on their five-day Gaeltacht tour, and has appeared onstage alongside a host of well-known Irish musicians. She recently played on the first of the two New Music Seminar Irish Nights at the Bitter End in Greenwich Village, New York. She writes mostly in English and many of her songs tackle contemporary topics from a fresh perspective while never losing touch with Celtic roots; thus her set usually includes one or two traditional songs in Breton and Welsh. After working for a time in America she

returned to Wales in 1985 where she was offered her first television acting part in "Tan Tro Nesa", a six-part drama serial in which she played a singer in a young band of the same name. Between '85 and '88 she studied for a law degree at the London School of Economics while continuing to do solo gigs. She also played the college circuit in London and Oxford with an eight-piece rhythm 'n' blues band. She's been based in Ireland since 1989.

Lir

FIVE young men from Dublin are making a sound that hasn't been heard since our older brothers bought their first Yes album. Lir specialise in musically-precise progressive rock with a twinge of psychedelia and a lot of obvious Led Zeppelin influence.

It's a strange formula that could have condemned the band to the fringes of pop taste. Instead it's garnered their critical acclaim from press and pop pundits alike, and their concerts often attract top musicians, presumably to pick up some tips from these youthful maestros. The American magazine *Creem* described Lir as "Dublin's new heavyweight contenders" after their writer Richard Gehr saw the band at last year's *Hot Press* Music Seminar Showcase. He was impressed by the band's "deft instrumental flourishes" and the "charmingly ridiculous nehru outfits", and also by their cited influences, of which the less obvious ones were Queen and Nick Drake.

Most people are impressed by Lir's musical wizardry, but some have reservations about the revival of a rock form that may give birth to a whole new generation of concept albums and epic rock songs. However, if prog-rock is to make a comeback, then there's no better band than Lir to lead the second generation. At the recent New Music Seminar in New York, the band once again grabbed the spotlight with a dazzling performance, making an impressive debut in the one country where you can still hear "Stairway To Heaven" on daytime radio.

Therapy

THERAPY is an Irish band that plays the kind of music you've never heard from an Irish band before. With energy lifted from hard electro demolition thrash and the power of the fiercest hardcore currently crossing the Atlantic, Therapy creates a sound which immediately separates the band from anything that's happening here or indeed in Britain.

Their strength comes from their live performance - a loud, rowdy burst of vigour and velocity that genuinely renews your faith in the art form. Then again as an art form it's an acquired taste. And if you could never file your taste under "noise" then you'll never like Therapy.

Their seven-track debut mini-album "Baby Teeth", which includes "Meat Abstract", the debut single released in August of last year, is a celebration of noise so fans of American toughrock hardcore merchants from Husker Du to Big Black finally no longer have to look 5,000 miles to the West. Andy on guitar and vocals, Michael on bass and Fyfe on drums came together as Therapy two years ago in their native Belfast. The band's reputation has spread on the strength of support slots for Fugazi, Ride, Loop and Teenage Fan Club.

Currently they're the darlings of the British music comics. While *Vox* declares that "... if this seven-track debut represents Therapy's baby teeth, they'll soon have the bite of a pit-bull", *Melody Maker* sees it as a return to the centre, as the only current example of "this sort of rock music, tie-dyed and splintered to death as it's been, (that) can still whip up feelings of danger when pushed hard enough." The *NME* calls "Baby teeth" "the noise record you've always wanted... Therapy are dark but enticing: a definite return to the powder-keg philosophy of guitars". A song on their soon-to-be released three-track 12-inch is called "Potato Junkie". It's about James Joyce.