Urmston's Alternative Music Night

By

Ben Lee - Guitar Dojo Magazine #1
Winter Show: Saturday 7th December 2024

It was raining in Urmston. Warm and cosy inside KAS Studios however, people had gathered for an evening of musical acts from the Guitar Dojo.

When the opening lyrics of the evening *"Singin' in the rain, Singin' in the rain"* began, there were a few happy laughs from the audience. Inspired by *this* John Martyn performance, carefree scatting switches back and forth from major to minor blues during the outro *"Doo doo doo, doodle doo doodle doo"*. Coupled with a diminuendo (gradually getting quieter), the effect was a relaxed atmosphere as the final chord rang out. Judging by the drum-kit and guitar amps however, it might get loud...

*Song Notes: Nice harmonics at 1:14. Guitar slightly too quiet, DI through desk rather than amp. Quieter vocal dynamics during verses. Don't rush the ending.

Throughout the article I will include links to recordings of the performances along with timestamps when referencing specific moments in the song. I'm also adding notes on what can be improved upon for next time; a lot being issues with volume levels which can be improved with a longer soundcheck, sound-assistant and setting guitar volumes to 7 so musicians have room to boost their level when needed. Also the line-6 guitar amp just isn't cutting it.

Electro-Pop with a classical twist,

Off to a good start and swiftly into the next tune *'Glide'*, one of Ben's originals.



Inspired by Irish folk music's ¾ time, 'Glide' is an optimistic song which encourages listeners with vivid imagery. Plans made to record in 2025.

*Song Notes. Solidify chorus vocal melody. Stay in the emotion of the final chord for longer as the song ends.

There's something extra special about hearing people's original songs. One day Guitar Dojo will have its own studio and label, and we can produce more! This coming year there'll be more song-writing taught in lessons. Luckily, the show was filmed so there are links for the performances. *1) Singin' in the Rain + Glide*

*Video Notes: Slightly dark. Could use side lighting.
*Compare notes: Less waffle,more music! Quick soundcheck to ensure levels are balanced between instruments (Have sound assistant).
Energy when introducing the acts. Play tunes over PA between songs.
*Song Notes: Practice vocals on piano.

Next up were the lovely voices of Amelie, Izzy and Zoë, joining Ben for a rendition of *Heavenly Father* by *Bon Iver Ft. The Staves* (*essential viewing*). Chords are made out of a minimum of three different notes; root, third and fifth. Throughout *Heavenly Father*, Amelie sang the root, Izzy the third and Zoe the fifth which harmonised to match the guitar. Other times they would sing contrasting melodies to transition between sections *2) Heavenly Father* see 2:00).

*Song Notes: Beautiful, thank you guys. Timing and lyrics for "but you're free now". Needs bass and tenor singers!

Helena joined the singers on piano to perform *Royals* by *Lorde*. It's a version from the grade 3 vocals exam with Izzy singing lead. There was an added challenge as grades 1-3 usually play a shorter version of the song and in a different key to the original, both things being true of Royals.

Izzy and her mates found the key in the chorus and they also backed her up for the harmonies. Hats off to them for having the courage to get up on stage and sing. We sold 55 tickets at this event, and with 24 performers and 2 bar staff there could have been up to 80 people listening! *3) Royals*

*Song Notes: Practice to instrumental track and memorise lyrics/structure. Helena very nice work on the tempo - bang on 85 bpm!

Next up was James who performed his Grade 1 piece *4) Oh Yeah* by *The Subways.* The song features open and power chords on distorted electric guitar. James played with great energy and feel, especially during the build-up before the final chorus. This would sound great with a full band, well done JJ!

*Song Notes: Practice transition into C chord, first finger on string 2.

Ben's baby cousin Brendon was the life and soul of the gig. He was in a party mood as he was turning 2 the next day when he would be having a bouncy castle party. Listen to his vocal warm-ups before Maksim, performing for the very first time, plays *Rolling in the Deep*, by *Adele*, also from his grade 1 exam. The song features palm-muting, power chords, and a solo! All of which Maksim performed faithfully and even added his own signature bend to the tricky final D minor chord. *5) Rolling in the Deep*

*Song Notes: Bar 3 of the Intro, play an extra powerchord before changing.

[Cameron, Georgia and Ben playing to a packed crowd]

6) Here Comes Your Man Max Davies who starts the *Pixies* cover with The Hendrix Chord (an augmented 9th) before launching into the mega-catchy *Dolittle* riff. In the pre-chorus you can hear an audience member sing *Pixies* bassist *Kim Deal*'s "So long, so long". Great job Max!

*Song Notes: Ben's guitar too much reverb. After the 2nd solo there's one more pre-chorus.

*Compare notes: Should have said "give Max a hand" afterwards and kept him on stage as he's on next for Float On. Sorry Max!

Joining us is Guitar Dojo's Gen X representative and Max's Dad Mark on the bass. Also, Guitar Dojo's session drummer of the evening, the staggeringly talented Georgia, who played on 18 songs throughout the night - thank you Georgia! The next song *Float on* by *Modest Mouse* is an upbeat and funky tune with a "rise-above-the-noise" message. To add to the fun, Max used his guitar's whammy-bar for 3 awesome SFX in verse 2. *7) Float On*

Song Notes: Ben's guitar too much reverb. Slightly fast (BPM = 101).

The newly reformed *Oasis* made an appearance (in spirit) with Cameron Ward and his covers of *Half the World Away*, *She's Electric* and *Stand by Me* *8) Oasis Covers* . Cameron naturally assumes the role of frontman and leads the band confidently as can be seen in Half the World Away at 1:21 and the ending of She's electric at 7:55.

At this point in the show the camera's battery was running low, so we decided to play Stand by Me a bit faster to fit in as much as we could before it cut off! *Song notes: Well done Cameron! Could use bass. Soundcheck for next time. Ben's guitar too much reverb. Remember lyrics - memorise first word/phrase of each verse i.e. "electric -verse 1, sister - verse 2, brother - verse 3, cousin - verse 4". *Stand by Me* - 85bpm. Ben "stand by me" check harmonies on piano.



Shoutout to Caroline Lee for performing a rapid battery-swap and catching the end of Stand by Me *Here*. Cheers Mum! (XO).

Enter Luca to the stage with an awesome guitar for some pop-punk and indie hits, starting with *9) The Rock Show* by *Blink 182*. The 2 string melody heard at 1:44 is simple but sounds really nice. He was a bit quiet so we turned him up for the next song *11) Kids* by *MGMT*. As a stylistic choice, Luca plays the main melody using only harmonics, a special way of plucking the string 12 frets above the fretted note which creates more of a chime than a pluck. Not only that but he wrote his own tapping solo which sounded awesome! Keep an eye on him at the next show!

*Song notes: Turn Luca up more! Kids main melody during chorus.

Things were ramping up as Ollie joined the stage for an anthem by heard from the audience at 1:10 for instance. The solo at 2:48 most likely Manchester music legends Buzzcocks and *11) Ever Fallen in Love*. The energy was great! This is a good one for a mosh-pit.

*Song Notes: Build-Up is 6 bars. Third chorus = double chorus.

12) Steady as She Goes and straight into the next banger from Jack White's band *The Raconteurs.* The guitars play around with the syncopation, beginning by accenting the fourth beat and then on the next cycle, half a beat sooner (the "and" of 3). This catches the listener's ear as it breaks an established pattern and seeing both Ollie and Luca's guitars do this together without a group rehearsal is commendable and looks really cool live. Well done guys!

*Song Notes: At 2:10, wait 2 bars before the guitar round.

Luca's guitar.



One song that can really get a crowd singing along, especially in Manchester is *13) Don't Look Back in Anger*. *"SOOOOO SALLY CAN WAIT!"*
Here's one of his performances on a

had some air guitar but this wasn't caught on film.

*Song Notes: Ollie down, Luca up.

Arwan performed brilliantly on piano for the next tune *14) Ooh La La* by *Faces*. Arwan has improved so much this year and always has a big smile on his face when he's playing. Unfortunately he was positioned quite
far back on the stage so you can't see! Luckily we could hear his lovely playing. His extended outro chord was one of the highlights of the show! Ollie accompanied on electric guitar to add to the song's wistful undertones. Stylistically he played double-whole tone bends, where you bend a note up a major-third. Or if you don't play guitar - a bloomin' long way!

*Song Notes. Turn Ollie way up, piano slightly down. All slow and end together on the final chord (watch piano). Piano placement forward.

*Compare notes. Position mixer in a better position (can hear better from the front).

From his grade 6 guitar exam, Ollie dazzles the crowd with an awesome rendition of 15) Johnny B Goode. During the solo at 1:26 Ollie blends a mixture of Chuck Berry's original melody with his own improvised phrasing - all at a whopping 170 bpm! Hearty cheers from the crowd at the end of this one.

*Song Notes: Include minor pentatonic patterns 4+5 when improvising. Full band one day.

It's just excellent next from Ollie as he plays us a tune by *Jimi Hendrix* himself; *16) Little Wing*. Ollie captures the feel and tone of the original and conveys it brilliantly. All those hours of preparation paying off for a solid performance - well done Ollie!

*Song Notes: Play with a band and decide/write an outro

Elliott Smith is a Guitar Dojo favourite. accompanied Mark's guitar and lead vocals really well throughout their set, particularly on their first song *20) Boys* weird TV show from the 90s *Elliott Smith - Clementine*, I would have been two months old at the time. It was really fun to be able to perform *17) Clementine* with Ollie. Played in an alternate tuning, Smith's chord changes are beautiful, clever and unexpected, making his music sound unique and providing a colourful, ever-changing backdrop for his melodies and close vocal style.

*Song Notes: Turn vocals down a touch. More precise vocals and dynamic control (starts of phrases, see 0:50) DI Guitar.

The next artist to the stage is the mega-talented Megan who performed her own song *18) Untitled #1*. Vocally the song spreads a two and a half octave range: The lowest being a G2 (see 0:47 and 1:03) and up to a B4 in the choruses (see 1:16). I really like how in the bridge/build up (2:58), the energy keeps developing, and how the last chorus has a new rhythm part (3:30). It's a quality song Megan, bravo!

*Song Notes: Start a garageband project for your song. Full band.

Introducing the wonderful Martha to the stage on lead electric guitar and welcoming back Helena, Georgia and Ollie for another *Elliott Smith* song *19) Waltz 2 (XO)*. All waltzes are in ¾ time, which gives it a jaunty and up-beat feel. I really like Helena's piano playing which helped tie the band together. I'm currently working on a full youtube tutorial for this song, so next time we perform this, we'll aim to have added bass, organ/keys and backing vocals.

*Song Notes: End on C major.

Next up was the brilliant *Baseliner*, who despite being a man down without their drummer, played an awesome set for us which the crowd loved. Craig's backing vocals and bass playing
Our very own *Paramore* tribute band *Maybe Williams* started off with our own version of *25) Caught in the Middle*. I like

Don't Cry. *Radiohead* are one of my favourite bands, so it was great to hear their version of *21) Fake Plastic Trees* which actually sounded really nice sang baritone rather than falsetto. Side note, cool shirt Craig!

Baseliner were straight in with another classic *22) Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)* by *Green Day*. Just listen to 0:23, the harmonies sound ace! Does anyone know anyone who plays cello? Some cello on this would be epic. *See Rock and Roll Cello Example*

To the crowd's delight, their next song is *23) Times Like These* by *Foo Fighters*. The lyrics are simple but powerful and the boys did it justice - nice one Baseliner!

Notes: At this point in the show, the camera's memory card was filled so there's no footage of 24) Losing My Religion unfortunately. If anyone filmed it on their phone please let me know and I'll upload it, thank you! 🙏

Baseliner original?

Another favourite Guitar Dojo artist is *Paramore*.



Here's one of my favourite Paramore moments. Once I saw Hayley Williams dancing, I was hooked.
Paramore - Caught in the Middle - Live

bass during intro and let ring out underneath guitar solo moments.

when upbeat songs have depressing lyrics. Martha seems so relaxed on stage and coolly breezes through the tune.The bassline is really fun too! Check out 3:02 for a single bar of 2/4, where we all suddenly cut back into the chorus two beats sooner than expected.

*Song Notes: Really nice at 2:42 where Megan and Zoe's backing vocals "*all the glory days are gone, it's over now, I'm on my own*", create a counter melody to Martha's "*I don't need no help, I can sabotage me by myself*". Zoe could do the extra guitar part if we play it again. Turn Martha up.

A ¾ love song next *26) The Only Exception*, with Martha on acoustic guitar and lead vocals and Megan on piano and backing vocals. We decided to include a piano to mimic this stripped-back version of the *song*. One thing that makes this song effective is that Martha plays solo all the way up to 1:25 just before verse 2. Having the band join in after such a long time really lifts the impact of the second verse. A similar drop-out occurs between the piano solo and the final chorus.

*Song Notes: Awesome vocals Martha,you sound like Hayley! Will turn you up next time.. Work on second time the band joins in and tighten up bass outro. Piano chords from 2nd verse.

Awesome vocals from Zoë as she takes the mic for *27) Hallelujah*. One of their rockier tunes, Megan starts off with a bright distorted riff before the rest of the band join in. Zoe starts off in the upper part of her register and a massive difference can be heard at 1:36 for verse 2. When singing one octave lower, her voice sounds really full and powerful - love it! Another brilliant moment at 2:33 when Martha injects some new life into the song as we had until then, been dragging behind the tempo of 151 bpm. *Song Notes: Tighten up rhythm section also with Izzy on bass and Georgia on drums keeping everyone together nicely, particularly at the song's abrupt finish, which is in the middle of the second bar of the seventh

Maybe Williams end their set with a bang with *28) Ignorance*. It's fast paced, loud and features a killer guitar solo at 2:58. With two backing singers adding some layered harmonies to Amelie's vocal, the only thing missing is a crowd to stage dive into! *Paramore: Ignorance - Live*

*Song Notes. Megan louder, bass down. More harmonies!



I'm really looking forward to playing more *Paramore*. Hopefully they make another album. They'll have a lot more fans now as they supported Taylor Swift on tour this year.

You're going to want to keep an eye on the next band. They've been regulars of the Guitar Dojo open mics and have started work writing their own songs. *Melophobia* is Georgia, Amelie, Izzy and Zoë and they started off with an iconic song, first released in 1989 *29) Where is My Mind?* by *Pixies*, complete with Kim Deal's iconic vocal and Black Francis's "stop!"- Great job guys! *Melophobia* display significant dynamic variation between the verses and choruses for that distinctive grunge energy and contrast. Really cool from Zoë at 1:55 when she nails the solo before playing the riff and singing the backing vocal. Amelie sounds great on lead vocals and fronts the band excellently. Her delivery of the choruses subtly adds her own distinct style. Solid performance from the
has been great because they are class musicians, I've learned a lot and the tunes have been really fun; *Example*.

chord cycle! A bit of non-verbal communication from the band however and they end just like the record. Zoë's final vocal to end the tune is spot on and has a haunting feel to it - very cool!

*Song Notes: Awesome job everyone! Minor chord slips but well recovered. End on a stab rather than let ring.



Shoutout to Martyn and Caroline for the footage of the next two tunes!

It's a tradition that every show we play a Smashing Pumpkins song. Zoë's starts *30) Today* with a bright, solo guitar riff. Georgia and Izzy drop-in at 0:05 for an awesome wall-of-sound moment. A gorgeous vocal and vibrato from Amelie at 1:24 "*I'll tear my heart out*" and again at 2:09 "day", followed by a killer riff from Zoë at 2:18.

*Song Notes: The tradition lives on!

Melophobia's final song *31) My Hero* was just ace from beginning to end. One moment that stands out was the build-up section, which got the audience cheering before the whole band expertly joined together for a final chorus. Awesome work guys!

*Song Notes: Melophobia original?

Welcoming Sean, Louis for a *Waterboys* hit *32) A Man is in Love*. This year I've had the pleasure of playing Irish Trad music with these guys which 'melancholic funk'. Full song can be heard here - *No Sun No Rain*.

*Song Notes. Guitar loud from start. Set delay tempo 107bpm. Breath control to avoid clipping. Iron out notes vocally. Add SPD track.

Being a three-piece can mean you're

Fiddle player Evelyn was at a Sam Fender gig but we had Mark for some much needed bass.

Sean's whistle playing provides a uniquely joyous tone to the evening's otherwise rock proceedings, which to me always evokes images of green pastures and quiet cottage villages. The Shire basically. Sean is a veteran of the Celtic rock scene and has a wealth of knowledge and experience as a working musician. Plus he always has a good rock and roll story on hand.

*Song Notes: Slightly faster. Bass anchor on kick drum. Acoustic guitar.

Sean's passionate singing in part is due to his acting background whereby embodying the role or character can help more accurately deliver the emotion intended behind a song. For example, hand gestures emphasising phrases during this festive performance of *33) Fairytale of New York*. Amelie, Zoë and Sean's voices work really well together and it doesn't take much encouragement to get the audience singing along. Bonus points to the bar staff for some excellent dancing. Apologies for the video cutting off!

*Song Notes: Acoustic guitar and bass.

The final act of the evening is my own band *Veneer* with Ant on drums and Seth on bass and backing vocals. We've been writing and recording music for nearly seven years and have played various gigs around Manchester. Our aim is to play a festival playing original music and we'll begin applying before the year is out. We open with a song from our first EP *34) No Sun No Rain* which is a band favourite, that all I can think to call is

A massive thank you to all the parents and mates who came and supported the performers. It really helps musicians to gain confidence and deal limited in how big of a sound you can create. To remedy this, we started loading our backing tracks onto a sample pad (SPD), which allows us to play our songs live with a full instrumental arrangement. Our next song *35) Now or Never* was our first live use of the SPD and... it shows. We were completely out of time and this caused some on-stage confusion. We pulled it together in the end however and we managed to finish the song with the backing track. Oh well - live and learn! Here's how it should have sounded *Veneer - Now or Never*.

*Song Notes: BPM = 152. Practice for timing and levels. Vocals need ironing out melodically and work on breath control to avoid clipping.

Luckily, we're successful with the SPD in our next song *36) Suspended*. We recorded lots of feedback tones which harmonise to create what we call our "Whalenoise", which helps add a thicker texture for our sound. We also added guitars and vocal harmonies to give a boost during specific moments. We may have got carried away with the reverse vocal harmonies during the outro, you can hear the new single here - *Suspended*. *Song Notes: Outro vocals down on SPD. Turn down final bars of feedback and create live feedback to end.

To close, we played a new song *37) Waster*, which we'll be recording in the new year. It's fun to play because it's angry and punky but the chorus is mega catchy. At this point my brain was pretty much boiled and it was time to close. Well done everyone! 🥳

*Song Notes: Write solo, different vocal delivery final chorus. More feedback to start the song.

for me are about even more than just the great music and encouragement of our young people. A Greek word that comes up often in my work with communities is 'koinonia' - which roughly means a deeper kind of sharing and fellowship - in which

with nerves by experiencing playing to an audience, and it's a nice added bonus when there's a great turnout and everyone is attentively listening.

And of course thank you to everyone who performed! I'm very lucky to have so many talented and passionate students and I couldn't be prouder of you all. When I think about where I was twenty years ago, playing *Smoke on the Water* on my uncle's electric and where I am today surrounded by lots of great people, and still being able to play music everyday, I'm greatly encouraged that every hour spent practicing was more than worth it. Who knows where we'll all be twenty years from now, but what I can say is the plan is to return in February 2025 for an Open Mic at The Volunteer in Sale. All music-lovers welcome, see you there!
-Ben xo

Quotes:

This was a great event with some amazing performances, showcasing a wide range of talent from relative beginners through to more experienced performers. We love how this is a comfortable environment for everyone to perform with such a supportive crowd. And we're really pleased to be able to be a part of it and other Guitar Dojo open mics and to see how all of the performers are improving each time. Great event Ben. Keep it up and thank you. Mark (Baseliner)

I really feel that Ben is gently fostering something precious and unique here - profound even in its own unassuming way - with these wonderful events, that everyone, across all ages and backgrounds, is welcomed, contributes, is celebrated and encouraged. We don't get too many opportunities for 'koinonia' these days, amidst our too isolated, and too frantic, digital lives, and with all the anguish going on all around us I reckon we all desperately need it. I'd say we've got some serious koinonia going on here! It'd be great to build on it, maybe make a point of moving about and getting to know one another better at future events (note to self! I can be a bit reserved at times meself - unless I'm on stage!), perhaps stick around a bit longer after our own young uns have had a turn in the spotlight to encourage the others and so on. All the people I've spoken with so far, children, parents and grandparents alike, have been absolutely lovely folks. Anyway, just my wee twopenneth on the subject - in the hope that these magical events keep going from strength to strength next year! Huge congratulations to you Ben especially- and Merry Christmas everyone 🎅🥳

The guitar dojo provides a safe place for all to practice in front of a live audience and for all ages to experience live music which has become so unavailable in this expensive and technological world! Being brought up in a musical family I am glad to pass on the enjoyment of it to my children either playing or dancingHappy Christmas to all and Ben keep being inspirational and I can't wait to see what 2025 brings! (Debbie, mum of Helena on keyboards, Lucia on observation and Brendon firm participant!)