

There's a new movement in town, **antifolk (UK)**. It's drunken, belligerent, raucous, sensitive and spontaneous. It eschews folk and anti-folk (US) orthodoxy to strike out into uncharted territory. Confused? Let *Plan B* be your guide...

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Polaroid photography: **Everett True, Cat Stevens, mertle**



the opposite

There's a new movement in town.

It's British, predominately. Wouldn't translate to the States or Europe, let alone any of those countries where they object to the cultural hegemony of a bunch of rich white corpulent complacent war-mongering tastemakers. It's too rooted in the humour of British culture: the ways it is and isn't acceptable to express (male, mostly) feelings within that culture. It exists at that weird crossover point where laddish working-class male humour meets downwardly-mobile middle-class banter: it's not above taking potshots at itself (it frequently does) and it's pissed off and alienated by the prevalent mainstream, both at its reliance upon *NME*-sanctioned guitar bands that ceased to have any resemblance to being a tool of the revolution around about 1982, and its fondness for pumped-

up elongated talent shows where the ability to bully someone in a less fortunate situation than yourself is seen as a plus.

Antifolk (UK) should not be confused with its far more refined, stylised and effete American and Continental counterpart, anti-folk, which is basically people who are folk singers by any other name (with a smidgeon of punk attitude thrown in, whatever the hell that is meant to be in 2007) singing with acoustic guitars and some melody. Antifolk may well have been inspired by its New York counterpart, but it sure ain't about Jeffrey Lewis and Herman Düne.

Sure, it's a relation... the sort of relation you talk about in soft murmurs and scandalised whispers at weddings when your mother's back is turned.

"Antifolk is basically folk music," explains Brighton promoter Larry Pickleman, "people on the

underground level doing their thing – contemporary storytelling. Not with acoustic guitars. I've been an independent artist back as far as I can go, and there's no restriction on what I can do. In Ireland, where I grew up, I was surrounded by all this fucking fiddle-dee-dee when I was a kid, and all the songs I sang were either football songs, or 'kill Catholics' songs, sectarian songs with a good fucking beat. Antifolk is about writing songs without worrying about hit records, just being honest."

Antifolk (UK) is quite a small movement. The scene mostly exists in a couple of places – a few squats and open mic nights in London, the West End's minuscule 12 Bar Club (promoted by prime movers Filthy Pedro, David Cronenberg's Wife and JJ Crash), where inebriates... I mean initiates... are encouraged to get up on stage and swear at every



of attraction

opportunity; and in Brighton, where Pickleman's Sunday Sermons held sway during 2006.

"When we did stuff in Belfast," Pickleman continues, "the way you got a gig was put a gig on, set yourself a deadline. But [By the end of 2006] because I was putting on so many acts, I wasn't playing any gigs myself. It stopped being what it was about, so I bailed out. Most acts on MySpace remind of when I went to art college in Wales – all these well-brought up kids, totally devoid of passion or integrity. Even though I get the odd lame duck sometimes, the people I try to book are little cunts, totally not masters of what they do – it's that lo-fi DIY thing all over again."

In the *Plan B* offices, they've taken to calling this music 'Truecore' – this belligerent, unpredictable,

individual sound played with little regard for niceties or musical merit. Truecore, in honour for my own fondness for clambering up on stage and winding folk up – although if that was the only point for getting up there, it would get tired pretty quick.

I'm touched by the epithet, but not sure it's appropriate. There aren't enough women involved. (Notable exceptions include Eleanor from the Bobby McGees, and the totally charming nursery songs of Larry Pickleman's wife mertle.) There's too much alcohol consumption – and though I don't disapprove, it's not where I'm at these days. Also, it seems, the quieter you play, the more likely you are to be overlooked. And, despite antifolk's calls for an end to convention, there's still an alarming tendency among its practitioners to fall back upon an acoustic guitar and a droll, slightly deprecating tale.

Still, there is a willingness among some of the purveyors of antifolk (notably Bobby McGees, Pickleman and Spinmaster Plantpot) to put themselves on the line, to eschew the tired baggage of rock'n'roll, to place the personality first – and of that, I heartily approve. In proportion. Everything in proportion. Also, by the very act of getting up on stage with little extra adornment (instruments, band members) the antifolk lot are leaving more room for spontaneity, and hell yeah. I'm up for that.

"It's about grabbing whatever's at hand," explains Tom Mayne, mainstay of David Cronenberg's Wife. "Filthy Pedro now has Tim in his band, he plays the violin and squeezebox... Look Look Dancing Boys have their drumbeat, Larry has his sampler, I'm mainly electric... Sgt Buzfuz have a dulcimer. And you just grab whoever's available."

Spinmaster Plantpot



Truecore – oh, alright then – antifolk (UK) started a couple of years ago, when Tom, in tandem with Filthy Pedro, decided he'd had enough of not being able to gig regularly simply cos he didn't fit in with an established scene. So they called themselves antifolk, after the NYC anti-folksters. It was a handy appellation. It wasn't meant to refer particularly to a sound or musical instrument, more an attitude: immediately it started, you could draw parallels between the nasty tales of David Cronenberg's Wife and DIY counter-culture, while mandolin-toting Scots duo Bobby McGees draw their inspiration unashamedly from the twee post-C86 scene.

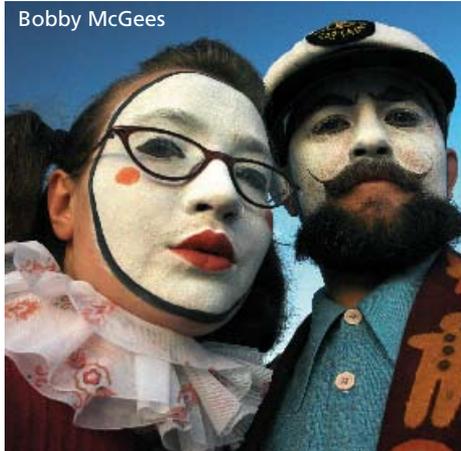
Most credit Sgt Buzfuz's Blang club at the 12 Bar as being the original place to hang out, but the good Sgt was reluctant to typecast his nights; so Pedro and DCW started promoting regular antifolk

'Antifolk is more self-loathing than narcissistic' – Spinmaster Plantpot

what punk was to rock," quoth Lach (whose genial, um, folksy sound has long since become part of the new orthodoxy).

"Last time I had Paul Hawkins down in Brighton I introduced him as spas rock," Pickleman says. "He wasn't so sure about that. I was like, 'Paul that's what you are, this freaky, tall, sixth former singing these really passionate songs'. He'll come through

Bobby McGees



'The people I try to book are little cunts, totally not masters of what they do' – Larry Pickleman

festivals, with their collections of chancers, dancers, drunks and the insane.

Open mic nights are a big part of antifolk: it's where many of its participants first got up on stage. There's in informal MC present, and anybody who wants can take a turn at the mic: like karaoke without the annoyance of having to stay in tune.

"There'll be drunk and homeless people walking around," states Tom. "Then a rapper will get up, somebody will bring a mummy onstage, someone'll do a poem... it's that kinda craziness."

Pedro set up the www.antifolk.co.uk site – not be confused with Pickleman's www.antifolk.org – and the scene was underway. But already factions were springing up...

"London, Brighton and New York are three entirely different scenes," states Pickleman. "There are crossover points – like Plantpot and Milk Kan. We'll invite David Cronenberg's Wife and Pedro down, but it's more like... I did a little spoof thing on the antifolk website about Buzfuz being Happy Slapped and they all got upset, and one of them deleted my name from antifolk on Wikipedia. People take themselves so seriously. But Jimmy [Bobby McGees] and I, he's Glasgow culture and I'm Irish culture – calling someone a fuckwit is the same as someone from London saying, 'Hi darling'."

The reason why I want to differentiate between 'antifolk' and 'anti-folk' is because the latter term implies knowledge of folk music – as its originator, songwriter Lach will tell you. He shouted the phrase in frustration at some Greenwich Village folkies in 1982, "If this is folk, then I am anti-folk". Y'see, anti-folk (US) isn't a movement against folk, but an intensification of the form. "Anti-folk is to folk

it. Winston Echo played the same night as you: wicked show, he really brought the audience to him. He's had us up to Northampton to play, him and The Retro Spankees... people were saying they're not antifolk, but what does that name mean – it's a little scene collective, a website, you can run with it a bit, but ultimately it doesn't mean shit.

"Traditionally, people outside London hate London, and Londoners are so unashamed at bigging themselves up, and people from up North are a little more humble. But that's the whole point of folk and antifolk, that it's regional."

Antifolk's participants don't, musically, seem to have much in common with one another: beyond a propensity to get up on stage and yell and swear and drink and maybe sing or use some form of rudimentary electronic backing – whatever it takes to make an impression.

"mertle met Jimmy first at a Schwervon gig at The Hobgoblin," recalls Pickleman. "She went down to check the Bobby McGees out, got on with them, and that was it. Scrapy [Milk Kan singer] got banned from The Hobgoblin, that was the first antifolk night we did – the little sound guy there was a twat, he was leaning down and Jimmy knocked a pint of beer over him. I can't exactly remember what happened with Scrapy, but back then he was a total pisshead. I was OK. When you're a promoter they let you away with murder. If it was Belfast, they'd have kicked the fuck out of me but the charm seems to work better over here."

Sure, I have sympathy with these people – Winston Echo with his bittersweet, quirky, post-Daniel Johnston tales of loneliness and hope,

deadpan, deadbeat humourist Adrian Teenbeat, the much-touted Sixties sex-rock of John and Jehn, Irish talisman Jinx Lennon with his quick-fire verbal sorties...

"Jinx is one of those guys," smiles Tom Mayne, "He's kinda mysterious,

in that he's got some great videos on YouTube, professionally well made, and he's made two albums – how's he managed to do that? He doesn't have much money; furthermore, he's unknown. I don't see him in magazines, I don't hear him on the radio, he lives in a border town between Ireland and Northern Ireland... If you want an example of antifolk, there's one. He plays 20 songs in half an hour – he puts so much effort into it, no matter how many people have turned up."

There's diminutive blagger Spinmaster Plantpot (office manager at the Houses of Parliament: now carving out an alternative career as TV's resident mouthy short-arse), former Country Teasers The Rebel, fast-paced rapper Stuart James, Lucy Joplin with her size zero, degenerately honest acoustic songs, the perverse word-play of Filthy Pedro – even my cherished Stolen Recordings bands (notably Matthew Sawyer And The Ghosts) have been affiliated with antifolk...

And then there's Milk Kan.

"Scrapy [Milk Kan singer] wants to attract as much attention to his music as possible," suggests Mayne, "but he still plays the antifolk festival for nearly no money. He was one of the first to be involved, but his songs really lend themselves to



radio play. I remember seeing Kate Nash months ago, playing a show at the Betsey Trotwood to 10 people. Now, she's on every billboard... but the songs of Milk Kan and Thee Intolerable Kidd are far stronger, so why aren't they on every billboard?"

There's a great compilation antifolk album, released this month, available from the website. It's called *AFUK & I (Vol 1): Up The Anti!*, it features pretty much all the above artists and more, and I'd recommend you track it down. There's a great good time waiting to be had.

Has antifolk attracted much media attention?

"No, not really," laughs Spinmaster Plantpot. Why is that?

"It doesn't fit in to the aesthetic of what's considered cool," Plantpot replies. "Everyone's wearing Vans and skinny jeans and looking emaciated – that skinny white boy look. Antifolk is nothing like that. It's more of a fat white boy look. The current music scene is a little bit narcissistic. Antifolk is more self-loathing than narcissistic."

www.antifolk.co.uk
www.antifolk.org



Bobby McGees

Sure, they're antifolk. They play mandolins, act deprecating – their catchiest songs are all about how they've got no friends, not one – but can sometimes be surprisingly belligerent on stage. The face-paint is worrying, too. Jimmy has a thick Glaswegian accent and can't sing, so he growls out his twee-as-fuck words as a wonderful bearded counterpart to Eleanor's butter-wouldn't-melt rejoinders. They're contrived as all hell, but for some reason it doesn't matter; it's a joy to have them around. They released an insanely catchy six-track EP on Cherryade last year that entirely failed to set the charts alight, and in their spare time organise poetry brothels.

'We discovered antifolk in '74. About nine years before it hit New York'

When did you get involved with antifolk?

Jimmy: "We discovered it in 1974. About nine years before it hit New York. And 10 years before Eleanor was born. We invented the bedroom western in 1986, when I was 15 and Eleanor was six. We found a broken ukulele and wrote some songs that Johnny Marr later adapted and used on the final Smiths albums."

Eleanor: "We got an anti-folk compilation CD with all these New York artists on, and we were sort of... [gasps]. This was before there were any gigs in the UK that called themselves antifolk."

Jimmy: "You know how it is with London. When London does something different it claims it was the first to do it. But we knew about antifolk up in Leicester [where Bobby McGees formed] long before those cunts. The London scene is a lot more, for want of a better word, mainstream."

Stuart James claims that everyone involved in antifolk works in the public sector.

Eleanor: "That's not quite true, but a lot of them have got really quite high-powered jobs – like Tom from David Cronenberg's Wife. He investigates corruption in high places. I think he's a spy. A Russian from Oxford. He's lovely as well."

Is there a Brighton scene?

Jimmy: "There's a big folk scene in Brighton but it's crap. It's all rubbish. Very talented musicians, though. But there's a lad called Dylan that does a night called Simple Folk, and he's... have you ever seen the Hotel Pelirocco in front of the old pier, with all its different themed rooms? There's a space room and a cowboy room. And he uses that nasty little space to record his shows – the Fence collective, Americans like Kimya Dawson... He's a nice kid. He works in the cocktail bar and instead of paying the bands he gets them a room in the hotel for the night."

Any favourite bands?

Jimmy: "Have you heard The Duloks? They're just three mad girls, sitting around in sports top and running pants... they're mental. Try and see them live – they're like an electro Bobby McGees. Almost."

www.myspace.com/thebobbymcgees



David Cronenberg's Wife

Antifolk? David Cronenberg's Wife sound like a mid-Eighties independent band – sarcastic, sardonic and articulate, with dark Gothic undertones, a little bit shambling, some David Lynch surf guitar... but that's to the good, you know? Sure, they use minimal percussion and the focus is on the songwriting, but. I guess it all depends on how you define yourself, and as DCW's affable songwriter Tom Mayne puts it, "Antifolk embraces me with its dirty, deformed hands. Not having the full quota of fingers myself means that we're like kindred spirits." Tom is one of antifolk's prime movers – and he also boasts the scene's most disturbing love song, hands down, written from the perspective of a paedophile...

How did you get involved with antifolk?

"I moved to London from Manchester, and met Filthy Pedro at a gig. He said we should do a show and I said, 'How do you do one, I know nothing about it!' He had a contact at the Buffalo Bar who let us have a Sunday. The opening night Purple Organ [ex-Dufus] played at about midnight. And then we moved to the 12 Bar. What started with two or three bands that could be classed as antifolk has become... I mean, we've got a CD now!"

Why antifolk?

"It seemed to be the closest thing to me that I liked. You see so many bands in random places who are just awful, so clean – when anybody comes up on stage who is nervous, a little bit different... it's something I don't see often. There weren't many places where this type of person could come and play, so we thought we'd redress the balance a little."

'Antifolk is from the heart, spontaneous, sometimes humorous'

"For example, Stuart James is not the kind of guy who's going to say to a promoter, 'Check out my band, we're amazing!' But he's a voice who deserves to be heard. Me and Filthy Pedro started our bands so we could meet people of the same persuasion – anything unusual, bizarre, leftfield. Then the Bobby McGees and Larry in Brighton started doing the same kind of thing down there and... um... it's good to have those guys on the album. It shows that it's not just a London thing."

How would you define antifolk?

"I never like to talk about it in terms of sound – it's like saying that punk needs to be one electric guitar, distorted. The element of community is important, the idea of people doing something which is spontaneous, from the heart, very immediate, slightly humorous sometimes. Away from all these haircuts or the way a band looks. There's such a wide range of people in antifolk – Stuart James, Timothy Tomlinson, Milk Kan, who're geezers, Larry who's a law to himself – all these incredibly different personalities. We're grouped together by this individuality of purpose."

www.davidcronenbergswife.com



Jinx Lennon

Jinx Lennon is like antifolk's talisman – despite the fact is Irish, lives in Ireland, has fuck all to do with either the folk traditionalism of Woody Guthrie or the anti-folk traditionalism of Lach, and sings quite scary 100mph electric guitar-led songs about the folly of telling someone that their head is fucked up when your own head is even more fucked up, and guitars as magic wands. He sports shades. He spits bile and absurdist humour in equal proportions. He makes me break out in smiles like hives.

Why did you start playing music?

"I loved storyteller songs when I was a kid. My uncles had loads of Irish folk like The Dubliners and Wolfe Tones. Later, I used to play made-up tuning guitars and overdub with two tape machines in the early Eighties with a cousin but we would have been mortified having to play live, and then I was inspired by the strange DIY tape scenes where heads would sell their music on cassette in runs of 50 or 100. The catalyst for taking the plunge into live music was hearing about Jesus And Mary Chain in late '84 – the feedback thing over two or three VU type chord changes made playing live far more realistic. I loved the way they economised the whole Neubauten/SPK stage terrorism thing into a fuzz pedal."

"My home town was full of budding Eric Claptons and neo *Brothers In Arms*-type sounding outfits and the burst of foul-smelling wind from a feedbacking amp seemed like a just exorcism to exterminate the plush electric blue sheen."

Where does your name come from?

"There was a class bully named Jimmy who I called Jimmy the Jinx, but somehow the name rebounded on me. I hated the name cos stories would be made up about me making people fall off bicycles by looking at them. In the end I used it as a talisman, like the phoenix rising from the ashes."

How did you hook up with antifolk?

"Myself and my stage partner, the fantastic Miss Paula Flynn, did a couple of Irish tours with Hamell On Trial. Hamell told me to hook up with other antifolk heads so I went on the net and found Larry Pickleman and Filthy Pedro. Larry got me involved in the antifolk festivals in Brighton, and Joe Murphy from Buzfuz and Tom from David Cronenberg's Wife and JJ Crash got me involved in the London shows. I got some of the artists over to do some gigs in Dundalk and Dublin. There's a nice support system going on with the UK people."

What motivates your music?

"Just trying to clear the crud in my head and dealing with the disturbing things I see around me. I've felt so alone sometimes, going to live shows and seeing some awful singer-songwriter, so I like to give my performances a Baptist preacher edge. I want to inspire and uplift people."

www.jinxlennon.com

'I like to give my performances a Baptist preacher edge'



mertle

mertle writes simple songs about everyday objects and situations. 'Splish Splash Splosh' is a joyful paean to her washing machine, and 'Down At The Zoo' is painfully sad. There's rudimentary electronica in places, possibly courtesy of hubbie Larry Pickleman, possibly not – and her adorable 'My Bike' is, by some distance, the most charming moment on the antifolk comp. "I ride my bike/Wherever I go," she trills. "I pass the butchers/And spit on the window." Her Bored Housewife CR-r album is ace. She's even better live.

What made you want to start singing?

"I'm mad on all the old musicals. I used to watch them with my dad. I wanted to be singing and dancing about with Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis, so I guess they're to blame."

www.myspace.com/mertle



Kate Nash

You know who Kate Nash is. This year's Lily Allen, engaging, charming... maybe a little too aimed at the 'tweenagers. 'Foundations' is cool, though: and you can certainly hear traces of UK antifolk in her mockney accent and acoustic.

Talk us through the antifolk connection, please.

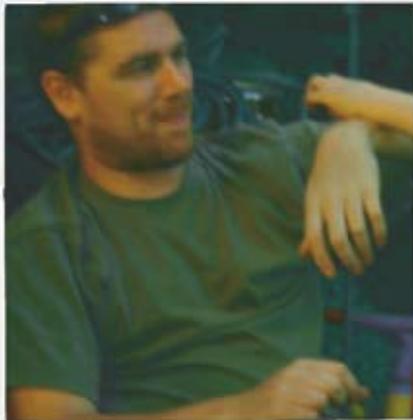
"I did an antifolk festival. We went to this We Are Amateurs night in Brighton at a tiny venue – that's where I met Peggy Sue And The Pirates [Kate's live support act]."

Who are your favourite antifolk (UK) artists?

"I don't really know what antifolk means over here – the nights I've seen are all amateur stuff. My favourite UK artists are Stuart James, and that old Scots bloke and his girlfriend who get dressed up in face paint."

Bobby McGees?

"Yeah, that's them."



Larry Pickleman

He's my main man. Promoter, provocateur, artist, activist, vegan, musician, father to three kids, from the bad part of Belfast... intimidating, hilarious, straight-talking, drunken... sweet, sensitive, smart... caused a minor furore at antifolk (London) HQ when he insisted they used his confrontational, yet chirpy 'All Blacks Are Bastards' rant on the compilation album, and they refused to print the title. Lives in Brighton, and is the reason why that city now lays equal claim to the antifolk (UK) crown. Plays full-on jaunty, anti-capitalist numbers like 'Go To School' and 'Midget Stick-Up' – imagine the Oompa Loompas playing Whitehouse. Really.

'What I do isn't particularly great, but the shit other people do is fucking awful'

Tell me how you got involved with the antifolk scene.

"I'd been making music for my cartoons for ages, and me and mertle [Larry's wife] had recorded some songs together, but new year's, 2004, we thought 'Fuck it, we'll perform live'. Apricorn Quartet had been in touch with mertle via luma [an early version of MySpace] to play an antifolk show in London, so I checked out the bands. Milk Kan and Bobby McGees were the only ones we could relate to, so we invited them and Filthy Pedro down to Brighton, and had a good laugh.

"When we started putting on the antifolk gigs, we got all these people in touch with us, but it was bad American-style stuff. All these people said they were antifolk, all this acoustic guitar, me me me me. Bollocks to that. It's a convenient term. Essentially, it's DIY with huge gaping gaps."

What's the motivation behind your music?

"I think of myself more of an artist than a musician, so it's like – when I first lost the plot I was 21 in Belfast, doing loads and loads of acid. The hardcore scene was big, and my best mate, who had a real bad drink and drug problem, kept fucking up every gig we did. I went fucking mad for a bit and ran back to my ma's house and locked myself in the attic. I'd listen to that Lou Reed album *Songs For Drella*, and it had this one song, *'The most important thing is work'* – and ever since then, doing creative stuff is the only thing that stops me from... fucking hell.

"You've got to rip stuff out and put it on paper – it's the ego, a mortal fucking thing. I don't think what I do is particularly fucking great, but the shit that other people do and put out everywhere is fucking awful."

What was all that fuss over the compilation?

"It's one of these audience-splitting things – that song's done me more damage than good, but still, it's there. In Northern Ireland they used to call the police the blacks. The skinheads had tattoos on their knuckles, ABAB – that's where it came from. I'm not into compilation albums much, anyway."

www.pickleman.co.uk



Milk Kan

I meet Scrappy from Milk Kan outside a pub in New Oxford St. He's looking bedraggled: woke up that morning on Clapham Common, clutching his guitar. Get to talking – plays me a couple of his songs, kinda like Kate Nash, only rude and belligerent, and with far better rhyming skills, and not averse to trying to cash in on Dolly Parton's name and shit-talking about drugs... um, not much like Ms Nash at all, then.

Scrappy's a diamond in the rough. Don't understand why he isn't massive. Whereas many of my other favourite antifolk performers aren't ever going appeal to anyone beyond me and a handful of similar losers, Milk Kan have total commercial potential. I've been grooving on Scrappy's tunes for a while – Milk Kan's debut single, 2006's 'Bling Bling Baby' is wide boy genius, like Mike Skinner given a Cockney makeover.

Tell me about Milk Kan.

"It all started on the night bus... getting home, playing songs, wanting to say something. It was just me and Jim [Jimmy Blade] at the beginning – ramshackle boys playing songs on guitars. And it kept growing. We were into tons of different stuff. I was collecting old school hip hop, Lonnie Donegan, Ian Dury, acid techno... I knew exactly what I wanted to do, but didn't know when I was going to do it. Out involvement with antifolk came from being in New York – we were at a mate's birthday party, and we'd brought along our CDs, and there was this antifolk thing going on. So I asked them if they knew of any open mics back in London..."

Would you define yourself as an antifolk artist?

"I don't claim to be anything. I don't feel I've got the right

'I don't know how long something can last before it gets spoiled'

to. Antifolk was a natural step forward – it was something that happened through meeting friends. Whether that means I am something or I'm not, I don't know. It's like anything. There are people you get on with, people you don't."

Do you think antifolk is reaching its peak?

"Yeah, it's weird now that it's growing bigger. I don't know how long something can last before it gets spoiled. It already feels a bit... I dunno... a lot of people almost try and jump on it. Who plays God in the world of antifolk to say this is it? Who decides? The British side is definitely different to the American side. The American side was already ruined when we got out there. There were a few good ones... but there was maybe 70 per cent, singing the same old bullshit. Back in the UK, everyone is edgy, fighting for it. Everything's new... there again maybe I'm biased because I'm British."

"But I don't wanna get into the politics of antifolk – it's a cool scene. It's been wicked watching it grow. I remember when there were just four names on that antifolk website and now there are loads. The nights are brilliant, sell out all the time. I hope it doesn't get spoilt, go the other way..."

www.milkkan.com



Spinmaster Plantpot

Spinmaster was my introduction to antifolk: on reflection, he gave me a very skewed perspective on what it was all about. His songs are mental: incomprehensible blasts of a cappella noise, insults and gratuitous rudeness hurled out at 100mph, immediate reactions to immediate situations, the odd welter of electronica and crowd banter to back up the verbals... Man, I love it. Didn't notice his diminutive stature, even though it clearly fuels some of his bile; didn't notice anything except a full-throttle, shake-it-till-it-tilts personality: clambering on stage unadorned with anything except a few scraps of paper, the odd pint and unwavering belief that people should SHUT THE FUCK UP AND LISTEN. In fact, in many respects, Spinmaster is the anti-antifolkster, 100 per cent spontaneous and eschewing the scene's most humble of props, the guitar.

Tell us a story.

"I started doing improvisation on tapes in 2003. I'd make these tape comps for friends, get a mic and do weird stuff between the songs. I did a 90-minute improvisational tape by myself, Sgt Buzfuz heard it, and offered me a gig at Blang. It all came from there."

How would you define an antifolk performer?

"It's the people that don't fit into other scenes, people with a bit of a punky attitude, the mavericks. It's honest music. It's not contrived. It's 'take me as you see me'. People just express themselves how they want. I do it for the outpour of emotions; apathy, anger and to be a show-off. I like the fact I'm a lot different, as well."

It seems that one of the ways antifolk (UK) differs from antifolk (US) is that it's more personality-driven.

"That's probably true. There's a bit of a shock element, people trying to outdo each other. It's funny and sensitive, but it's also got that rock'n'roll element. The most antifolk person I've seen is Timothy Tomlinson who actually does folk but in a hilarious way. Musically, he's a genius — he can play so many things, but he's also very self-deprecating. The verbals between the songs are absolutely side-splitting."

"The British scene is contrived, in that people actually said they were going to mirror what's going on in New York. The American scene evolved more naturally, but it's more troubadour-based. Attitude-wise, we've both got that punky DIY, get off your arse, make it happen attitude."

Tell me about some of your antifolk favourites.

"I really like Larry Pickleman, Milk Kan are fucking amazing cos they're so messy, a female singer called Poppy who has an a cappella tune called 'Thinking And Wondering', and a band called Little Things. I've always been a fan of people who can combine melody and aggression."

www.myspace.com/ppot

'Antifolk is honest music. It's "take me as you see me"'



Stuart James

Here's where this antifolk definition starts becoming problematic. Stuart James is not what I'd call 'antifolk' by any stretch — he's super-focused, meticulous, and raps in a monotone over a sparse acoustic guitar with incredible speed and flair, like an English (Leicester, originally) Jeffrey Lewis grown up on Nas and Dizzee Rascal, whom he covers, but shed of any Greenwich Village inclinations whatsoever. OK, Jeffrey is pure anti-folk, but damn, this boy ain't. But damn, this boy's incredible — commercial, too. But he aligns himself with antifolk, so fair enough...

What made you first want to sing... well, it's not actually 'singing', is it?

"No, it's not. It's tonal so I'm not talking, but it's not MC-ing either. It's more bad singing. I had the sound conceptualised a long time before I put it together. It's really, really hard work. There's nothing natural about it at all. It's proper graft."

I'm surprised you align yourself with antifolk — you seem to be the opposite of what they're about: not spontaneous or ramshackle at all.

"It's because when I started making music again, I didn't have an idea what was going on. I was doing something I'd made up entirely by myself, but didn't know what to call it. I thought of Outsider Music, but that's *too* outside. Antifolk had been kicking about for ages — and then I met Monster Bobby [promoter of Brighton's DIY club, Totally Bored], and played one of his shows. That was November 2005. Before that, I'd been doing open mics."

'I was doing something I'd made up entirely by myself, but didn't know what to call it'

What links these disparate characters together?

"It's unusual not to work in the public sector nowadays, have you picked up on that? Pickleman doesn't, but I can't think of many others. Jimmy from Bobby McGees used to be a teacher. It also helps if you've got a disability..."

Who or what inspires your music?

"Three things. Leonard Cohen's first album where he spaced out the rhythms with words — and if you play it at 45 it starts to sound totally musical. There's Nas' first album... there are several parallels between the two records. Both are very poetic, dark, rambling, and with beautiful urban imagery, line after line. And I read a poem by an obscure female poet which was all blocks of text, no punctuation. It was great."

I tell you who you remind me of — '78 London punk poet Patrick Fitzgerald. It must be the enunciation.

"Yeah? Is he fast — as fast as me?"

No, not as fast as you.

"That's alright then. That's all that worries me, man."

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Winston Echo

He's charming and shy on stage, blushing beetroot red as he asks the audience to, "Shut the fuck up... please." He sings gentle, post-Half-Japanese songs about vampire tea parties and girls at the foreign exchange desk, and the way birds float so beautifully in the air. He draws, strange unfocused scribbling, scratchy and nervous like his onstage persona. I'm very taken with Northampton's Mr Winston Echo.

What or who made you want to start performing?

"I've always felt at home on stage in front of people. I like to make people smile, and my uneasy mixture of nervousness

'It's easy to get complacent when you're getting applause regardless'

and bravado comes across as quite charming on occasion."

How did you hook up with the antifolk crew?

"Some friends recommended that I listen to the Bobby McGees, back before they were famous and dressed like sick clowns and let their egos get out of hand, and I did and thought they were charming. Then I saw there was a summer weekend being organised in Brighton by a chap named Larry Pickleman, so I sent him a CD. It was a pretty fun weekend."

Please describe Larry Pickleman.

"He cannot burp. He has a lovely family and is a nice guy despite the fact he'd love to be seen as a ridiculous pantomime villain. When he's drunk he can be scary and lose things in taxis."

Can you have a stab at defining antifolk (UK)?

"UK antifolk is very insular, which can be both lovely and very depressing. It's great to be able to play shows with people who are supportive, but it's also easy to get complacent when you're getting applause regardless. I feel that in some ways UK antifolk misses the point and chooses to embrace *everything* which adheres to its quirky, but traditional, songwriting style, regardless of whether the ideas are new or interesting."

Does antifolk exist outside London and Brighton?

"I'm not sure it does. Here in Northampton we struggle to do anything outside of the mainstream, being surrounded by careerist indie chancers and faceless masturbatory metal bands, as well as a saturation of trad singer-songwriter types trotting out sub-Bright Eyes acoustic-emo impersonations. I think that UK antifolk is really limited to London, and the half-dozen or so bands happy to label themselves as such."

What motivates your music?

"I just want to be able to write really great pop songs, without pretension, and make people happy. I hope one day to have a large band, maybe 15 people, with a choir, all handclaps and joyful singing, out singing my songs and turning rooms into parties and parties into festivals."

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