

dynamic Black R'n'B singer, Jenny Mac. I make a mental note to catch one of these events at the earliest opportunity.

But no matter what the line-up, it's a mystery to me and everyone else I know who has seen The Shelf, that they've not been snapped up and rocketed to stardom. Vicky is increasingly cynical – promises of a tour supporting Eddie Izzard came to nothing – no one with any clout seems prepared to take a risk with a band that can't be shoe-horned into any tidy niche or genre. (There's a sad suspicion that this is a very British narrow-mindedness – wouldn't happen abroad.) Terry too is under no illusions – a lifelong musician, he's seen it all and gone through the musical mill. Sure, with Elephant Shelf he's aware of the unique quality of the band, but talent doesn't always get what it deserves. 'We SHOULD be playing the 100 Club and Ronnie Scotts ... Give us centre stage at Glastonbury and we'd blow the audience away. That's how confident we are.'

They may not be getting the recognition they deserve, but Elephant Shelf play because they love to perform. They've no time for the apologetic performance of your run-of-the-

mill pub band – the four blokes in T-shirts and jeans, playing at ear-splitting volume who have no connection to the audience and seem transfixed by their boots ('shoe-gazers', they



'The band is unique – a one-off-there's just no-one like you!'

agree). They're passionate about playing and every performance is an event. Vicky admits, ironically, that even if they made it big and could take their pick of monster venues, it would be very hard to beat the sheer thrill she gets now, playing to an audience. 'Perhaps', she muses, 'we'll start producing our own shelves – signed by the band. Terry could have his own-style shelf, with his face on it. And then there could be Elephant Shelf handbags – and clothes pegs'. On a less flippant note, however, apart from new vocal influences for the band, they're also going to do more gigs as a five-piece, Vicky and Diana leading, to give all the members of the band an opportunity to develop their music.

## The Shelf family

The band is, risking a cliché here, much more than the sum of its parts. They are a mutual

support group, full of enthusiasm and admiration for each other's talents – and it's a positive policy to nurture each other's musical skills – not just the band themselves, but everyone associated with them. Hence road manager Martin's vocal harmonies when I saw them last. Robbie, apparently, isn't just a cracking bass player – he's a dab at stand-up comedy too, and has a great singing voice – and Dan is featuring more and more on harmonica. Thinking back to their last gig, Vicky reflects, 'In fact, I think Dan played the best of all of us that evening' – no good performance is ignored, no inspiration goes unappreciated.

There's something else about this close-knit unit – Vicky calls it a healing spirit. All the members have suffered traumas – Vicky underwent a family break-up due to transgender issues; Diana has come through serious illness, Terry has tackled and beaten addictions, and Robbie and Dan have dealt with their own struggles and lows in making a living out of their music and, as Vicky says, 'and Jessie Pie – well, she's Jessie Pie'. And through it all, they've bolstered each other up, given moral support and encouragement – and brought each other through.

Perhaps it's this mutual support and empathy which gives the band so much energy and momentum. Vicky founded Elephant Shelf and they've developed through the course of over 250 gigs – but she's the first to recognise that things would never have come together like this under her lead alone. 'Di has been my confidante and right-hand, all through. She is a great musical talent and has already recorded a huge number of her own tunes. With regard to the band, Di is a perfect complement to me – I float ideas, inspirations – and she puts everything in its right perspective and ensures it stays grounded and on course.'

So there's more than music which binds this eclectic bunch of personalities together – no egos, but a balance of people who complement each other and create the kind of sounds that make the hairs on my arms stand on end with pure pleasure. See them if you can.



### June

- 1 Caipirinha Jazz Bar, 177 Archway Rd, London N6 5BL
- 10 Eagle Inn, 127 Hampstead Road, Kings Langley WD4 8AJ 4pm
- 14 O'Neill's, 52 Tranquil Vale, Blackheath, London SE3 0BH
- 16 After Office Hours, 70 High Street, Barnet, EN5 5SJ
- 23 The Salisbury, 1 Grand Parade, Green Lanes, London N4
- 24 Le Quecumbar, 42-44 Battersea High Street, London SW11 (*Cleavage of Death*)

### July

- 5 Music Palace, Crouch End, 159a Tottenham Lane, Crouch End, London N8 (*Elephant Shelf Jazz/Rock Show*)
- 6 The Princess Alexandra, Park Road, Crouch End, N8 (*NB may change to Caipirinha Jazz Bar – check web-site*)
- 8 Eagle Inn (*as above*) 4pm
- 12 Music Palace, (*as above*) Elephant Shelf Jazz/Rock Show
- 15 Maddens, 130 High Road, London N2
- 20 Music Palace (*as above*)

### August

- 3 Olivier's Jazz Bar, 9 Nevada Street, Greenwich, London SE10 9JL
- 4 Music Palace or After Office Hours (*check website*)
- 10 Caipirinha Jazz Bar (*as above*)
- 12 Eagle Inn (*as above*) 4 pm
- 17 Olivier's Jazz Bar (*as above*)
- 23 Music Palace, Crouch End (*as above*) jazz/rock show
- 31 O'Neill's, 87 Muswell Hill Broadway, London N10

### September

- 15 Maddens (*as above*)
  - PLUS** First Crouch End Cajun, R&B & Jazz Festival at the Music Palace – dates to be confirmed
- Shows start around 9.15, unless otherwise stated**