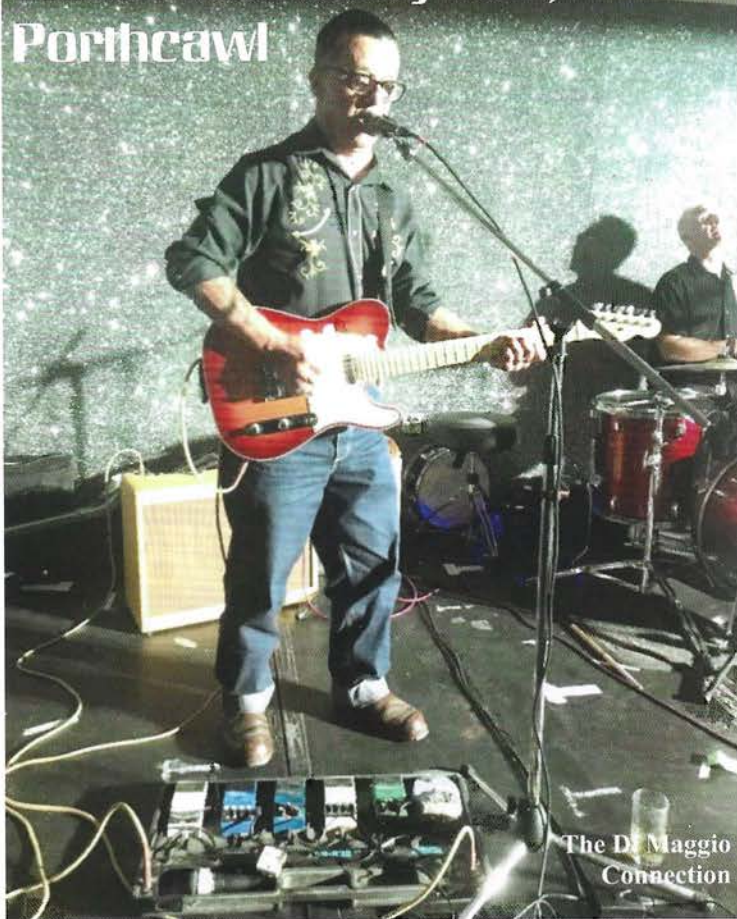


## Welsh Rockabilly Fair, Porthcawl



This was my first time at the 'Welsh', but if this was any indication of the entertainment on offer, it most certainly won't be my last. The event is held right on the coast in the lovely seaside town of Porthcawl, South Wales and while there were certainly a fair proportion of punters drawn from the valleys, others, like myself, came from all over. I arrived at around 2.30 which left a few hours to visit the rockabilly traders housed in one wing of the building and peruse the records and CDs offered by Alan Wilson on the Western Star stall and Steve Chapman on the Spindrift Records stall. My timely arrival also allowed me to avail myself of one of a fairly vast array of hot meals available at the venue.

Come six o'clock, however, I was happily ensconced at the bar to enjoy the first band, the Crawlin' Kingsnakes. It was at least five years since I last saw this band play, in Bristol, if memory serves me correctly.

The only tangible difference being that the lead singer and rhythm guitarist appeared to have traded in his gleaming, Gretsch White Falcon for a lesser model. This economy measure, however, did not affect the band's performance one iota. The band delivered a set consisting essentially of cover versions with one or two originals thrown in for good measure. The next band Razor Holler was entirely new to me, though they played an extremely good set of, again, mainly covers, but very adroitly chosen ones including wonderful songs from Johnny Horton, George Jones and Ronnie Dawson – a fine triumvirate.

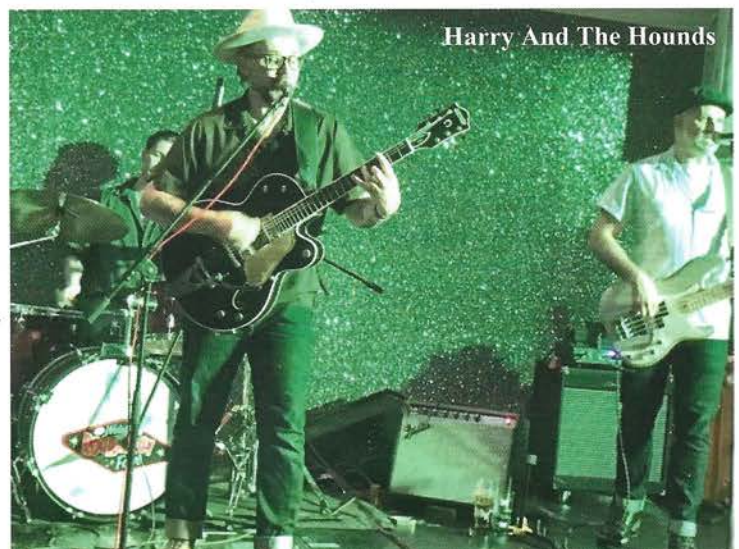
Hitting the stage at 1pm was the John Lewis Trio and what a way to round off a perfect first evening at the 'Welsh' with one of Wales' finest. In a week that saw 'Iechyd da' added to the Oxford English Dictionary, John did as he

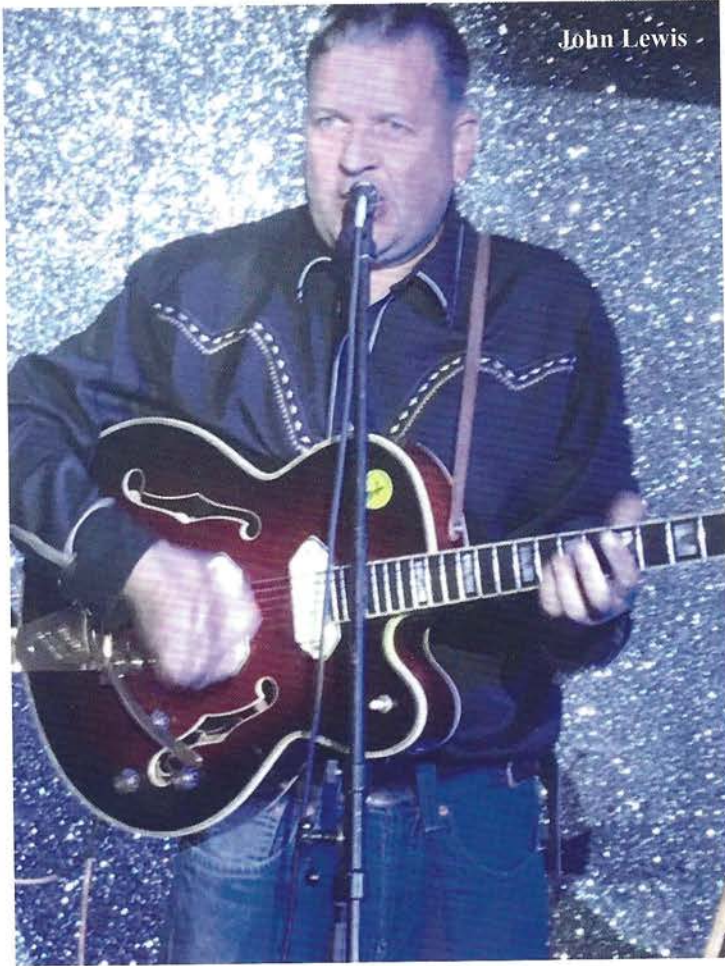
usually did and toasted the audience in between one exquisitely delivered song after the next. Favourites included 'Don't Take Your Past Out On Me' from the 'Where Would Rock and Roll Be?' album, and Hank Williams' 'Please Don't Let Me Love You' upon which John rather amusingly failed to generate the falsetto having taken a swig from long-term scenester Cindy's hip flask. Other gems included John's remarkable take on 'Chills and Fever' and Crazy Cavan's 'Both Wheels Left the Ground.' I you haven't seen John and his fabulous band of Nick Whitfield on bass and Billy Roberts on drums, before then you have been missing out big time. With a voice that is equal parts blues holler and Welsh congregationalist choir, John is also a superb guitarist and has the most wonderful stage presence.

To day two and the Lowdown Snakes got the day off to a good start, though I confess that I missed part of their set. Next on in the 4-5 slot were a band whose album I reviewed recently. In retrospect, I suspect that I was insufficiently gushing. On today's evidence this is quite a superb band. A four-piece with a piano player that lends the band quite a bluesy sound.

The band coast through classics like Jeanie Jeanie Jeanie. Perhaps the most crowd-pleasing moment of a first-class set came when the pianist played and sang a corking rendition of 'Roll Over Beethoven' that morphed into Quo's 'Sweet Caroline' with vocals reverting to Harry. I bought a CD from the band and look forward to tracing the band's development.

The next band Saint Dom and the Sinful, I confess I was entirely unfamiliar with. But what a discovery! The band dates back to 1983 as the Sinful, before calling it a day in 1987 having only recorded demos despite an appearance on television. It was in 2011 that the band reformed with Peter Turner of the Sureshots and Johnny and the Roccas fame on bass and on drums Marcus Coppin also from the Sureshots. The band set about recording all of those classic tracks written by Dom Malia and following the release of Holywell Dene the band has released a second very strong album called Bopperella. Fast forward to today and Dom and Peter are joined on stage by the moustachioed, Welsh wonder Mark Kemlo on drums. Despite playing some covers this is the band today that has played most original material and it is very good. Dom Malia, has received recognition very late indeed, but he is a superb neo-rockabilly song-writer also a





John Lewis

The Muskrats were one of my discoveries of the festival, not least because I didn't know that Elli was in the band. I know Elli from his sterling work as the electric bassist in Dick Thomas' *The Resurrected*. But in that band, he is the quintessential mute bassist. So imagine my surprise when I saw the gregarious nature of his character. He really is the life and soul of the party, he is also a very fine slap bassist and vocalist. At one point in the set, shortly after some uncanny George Formby impressions Elli played the wobble board before literally playing the kitchen sink. The band plays a mixture of covers and original material. Among the former category were 'Go,Go,Go', 'Tornado', 'Big River', 'Teenage Cutie', 'You're My baby' and 'Bertha Lou'. Any band that covers two Roy Orbison songs in a set is pretty good in my book.

classy version of Tennessee Ernie Ford's '16 Tons'. Other gems included a duo of Hillbilly Casino songs 'No One Else' and a 'Debt With the Devil' as well as stonking renditions of 'Justine' and the Polecats' 'Big Green Car'. I absolutely loved this band's set and I trust that it won't be so long until I see them next.

So, to the final act of the festival, all the way from Italy, the Di Maggio Connection. The band is based around the guitar virtuoso, Marco di Maggio, who I have seen live on only one previous occasion, but I own all of his albums. I can say without a hint of hyperbole that this Hendrix of Rockabilly is the closest that I have ever come to seeing a genius at work. Opening his set with two of my favourites in the form of 'Little Cabin Home on the Hill' followed by Ricky Nelson's 'Stood Up', he could have stopped there and I would have been happy, but in the end he played for close to an hour and twenty minutes taking in Buddy Holly's 'Everyday', Eddie Cochran's 'Teenage Cutie', and Johnny Burnette's 'Lonesome Train' along the way. This was a consummate band performance with both drummer and bassist highly skilled on their respective instruments. Put simply it was one of the best shows that I have ever seen, and I have seen a lot.

To summarise the Welsh Rockabilly Fair is something of a hidden gem, and one that I delighted in exploring. There is a really cool, chilled atmosphere to the festival and the bands that were selected to play, running the whole gamut of rockin' styles, was simply a joy to behold. I think that Kevin 'Red' Ramsey deserves particular praise in this regard. If you are reading this and contemplating going to the festival next year, I endorse it unreservedly – I had a ball.

*Nick Kemp*

very good singer and guitar player to boot. Theirs is a very strong performance and I shall certainly keep my eyes peeled for future shows. I recommend them highly.

Next up were the outrageously talented Sundown Boys, a three-piece sans drums with the outstanding slap-bass playing of Danny Brown creating the percussive rhythm section as well as the lower frequencies. I have only seen the band play once before at last year's Hillbilly Hoedown, although I have seen Danny play more recently for Toto and the Raw Deals. He and the rest of the band are excellent, playing many self-penned songs along with covers performed in their own inimitable style. The band is also set to release a new album in the next couple of months so keep your antennae in operation.

Which left just one band left to play on Saturday night, the Royal Flush. Hailing from Switzerland this band oozes

the sophistication of their homeland. Playing fairly authentic rockabilly the band's drummer is also the band's singer. Mercifully, he stands up whilst doing so, that way we avoid the total lack of dynamism associated with the sit-down drummer singers like Don Henley. Earning two encores it is quite apparent that the Royal Flush are one popular band and quite deservedly so.

The first band on Sunday were the Memphis Invaders. I had seen the band play very recently at the memorial gig for Tiny', the massive man with a massive heart who succumbed very sadly to cancer last year. On that occasion, I thought that the band was on fire and I also thought that the singer had a Glenn Danzig quality to his voice. To their credit the band filled a considerable proportion of their set with original material, thereby addressing my main gripe with modern rockabilly bands.

To the penultimate act of the festival, the Devil's Deuce all the way from Cornwall. I first saw the band plat one of the early Rockin' Round Ups in 2017. I remember it quite vividly as the band's then singer bounded over to me to complement me on my Hillbilly Casino jacket as the band covered two of its songs in their set. The next time that I saw the band was at the Pompey Rumble and the band had a new singer, but this was quite some years ago and I have heard nothing since. I rather assumed that they had called it a day. I was delighted, therefore, to see the band's name on the bill – and they delivered. I think that the rest of the personnel remained intact, though the bassist, who looked not a day over 15 would, I'm sure, have had to have been drafted in at a subsequent time. Opening the set with 'Sweet Love On My Mind', 'Yes I Do' and Larry Williams' 'Slow Down', the band didn't slow down until a