

No Cash Refunds + Amber Saqladi + Rhirhi



ACM tutor, professional music critic, and Buzz co-ordinator, Ngaire Ruth, takes herself to a new London monthly showcase event launched by our Buzz student editor, business student Jack O'Sullivan. Like this mag, he's aiming to celebrate ACM artists and bands and build a community. It's time to check out the talent our Buzz writers have been shouting about with a critical ear and eye.

He's no Mr Nice Guy (Ed Sheeran). He's cleverer than you and more confident than you'll ever be. He's your Jarvis Cocker, (Pulp), your Damon (Blur), your Brett Anderson (Suede), but mostly the first one. For that to happen you need a sound (that is next), intelligent and original lyrical themes, and performance skills.

[No Cash Refunds](#) isn't seeking expression by exploring musical formulas and pushing boundaries, this is about (re) defining and refining. Any artist or band that wants to represent this era will be a multiple-listener and multi-disciplinary in terms of musicality and performance. There is no blend or "ew" fusion of genres past and present, it is what it is: progression and regression inextricably linked.

Take the ballad, and new single [Empty Cup](#), a bold, cheeky beast that shows vocal skills and discipline, compared to the bedroom pop intimacy of the post-modern lullaby that is [Lily](#), or the punch pop-rap of [Petrified](#), an early opener. No song sounds the same, yet the style is consistent and the lyrical themes are original.

NCR has the core but he's been smart enough to reach out to his peers. Guitarist Toby's often classical and intricate playing adds an alternative authenticity. He's a definite secret weapon at this live show, (and I'd like to hear it in the recordings). The physicality in NCR's performance brings the songs to life, but you weren't here to see for yourself and now you can't say you were there.

No Cash Refunds is ready to go go go... appropriately because his ACM career is reaching its end. If we kept him any longer it would be the equivalent of crushing his spirit with a grand piano borrowed from Metropolis.

What's great about [From the Common](#) is that students can learn from each other. So many first-year ACM artists, rappers and musicians have experienced expensive capacity-massive concerts as consumers/fans, or the odd local gig, festival or family occasion as contributors with a crowd forever grateful. Understanding how you get from the latter to the former seems a mystery. You can pile on all the armour you need –

branding, business strategy, social media prowess – nothing beats watching your peers in your natural environment, a live medium-sized venue, outside the classroom.

For example, what to do in between the songs? How to compile a set list with a beginning, middle and end. What to wear, or more importantly how to wear it. When to stand up, sit down or demonstrate your fancy yoga positions (joking). For heaven's sake, when it's your turn, don't introduce every band member before the encore.

Some songs by creative artists [Amber Saqladi](#) and Buzz favourite [Rhirhi](#) on tonight's billing were written in their 15-year-old bedrooms, which they've started developing at ACM, along with new material produced outside compulsory assessment collaborations and their academic work. We could be a conservatoire, but our first years like Rhirhi, Rory Rocket and Elfi are arriving with healthy repertoires; they want to develop their art, as well as musical craft.

It's no surprise when Rhi covers The Cranberries song, [Zombie](#), the vocals needed reflect her kind of clarity and warm tone. Every song is brutally honest yet endearing and speaks for now, this time and place. There's always a twist, "*I'm obsessed with the mess that is you*" (Spring Clean), a song about an ex-boyfriend who's addicted to porn – gay porn, [Teddy's Song](#) is a gentle ballad because someone she met was feeling suicidal. Rhirhi may be the perfect image of a rosy-cheeked girl with a guitar in a pastel haze but don't ever use the word 'sweet' to describe her. There are clues everywhere, including the skull fabric of her dress and the lack of love she gives her Converse.

Footwear is a clue to genre overall all tonight. It's why so many famous rock photographs feature below-the-knee shots of the band's foot action on stage, pedals and monitors, and cables also setting the scene.

Singer-songwriter Amber is wearing white cowboy boots and sure enough there is a bohemian, country flavour in the songs on her set list tonight. Every song has a story: [Save Yourself](#), Broken Glass and [Summer Rain](#) stand out right now, all coming from a place of melancholy perception, coaxed by rhythm guitar. No Apologies is next for potential. What about you?

A top tip for both singer-songwriting guitarists tonight is to stop introducing the title of every song, and the explanations behind it, what you should be doing is putting that set list under the mic stand so people fight over it to add to their collection at the end. In the beginning, tell your friends to do it – why not? More importantly, how can that be put into the musicality? It may be this requires letting people in. That's an awkward prospect for the Covid generation, I know, but guitarists, bassists, drummers, and producers are all looking to find a tribe at ACM - and if you're in that category where are you? This venue is a hop and a skip from the student halls and two tube stops from the Clapham site – you don't even have to cross the road on exit from the station. There's comfortable seating so you can huddle with colleagues and make a night of it.

And a recommendation for Jack: what about the three acts put their names into a hat and draw on the day to decide first, second and final billing?

From The Common return to the Tooting Tram on [May 10th with Rory Rockett, Elfi and James Barlow](#) as well as [June 26th with Kinoko Curse, ACM Alumni City Lake and Isle of Wight Festival Main-stager The Optimists](#).