

# Gigging for it!

Van, meet **Monotonic**. The industry's biggest suck-face makes up again. **Sylvie Simmons** and **Manish Agarwal** check the talent.

## South By Southwest Austin, Texas

THERE WAS a story about a blogger who managed to review over 730 of the 1,700-plus acts at SSSW. Only he didn't actually go to the festival, just downloaded the music. If it weren't for the risk of sunstroke, the long lines of humanity outside Austin's venues would take off their hats to him.

Every year SSSW gets bigger, crazier and more impossible. Twenty-two years after its low-key start, it's now a speed-gigging bacchanalia where every chub, buzz, patio, park, car park and car roof blasts every kind of music: weird (*Monotonic*); mainstream (Van Morrison, R.E.M.); young (Johann Fyfe, Laura Marling); old (Loo Loo); official (Billie Eilish, unofficial (*Monotonic*)); hyped (Vampire Weekend, MGMT) and highly anticipated (Fleet Foxes; My Morning Jacket—frontman Jim James also took time to play a stunning solo show). The substantial British contingent was led by Duffy. Number 1 in the UK, she was third on the bill at MOJO's Saturday night Stubb's show beneath Okkervil River and Roky Erickson, proving just how much work is needed to crack the States.

After a while Austin's 6th Street main drag can look more like the 7th level of Hell—which is when the unsanctioned, bootleg activities provide welcome relief. Like the opening day *Florida Bonadigas* party, featured singer-songwriter ukulele sensation, *ex me*, and the closing MOJO BBQ (a cornucopia of new music starting Eli "Paperboy" Reed to Fuck Buttons, and Kitty Dinos And Lewis to Laura Marling—see our SSSW blog on [mojo-music.com](http://mojo-music.com) for a full report). Indeed, some of this writer's most memorable moments came off-roast.

A good example: *Monotonic* at the Fuck By Fuck You festival, a metal trio from Israel, vocals, drums, and guitar. Setting up in the middle of the dust floor of a corrugated compound named the Typewriter Museum, the singer (Ben Scott with Derek Sivali) mousethatch and Billy Squier's hair) physically abused the drummer (Bora's) double while the guitarist careened through the crowd or hung upside down from the rafters.

Official SSSW highlights for me included Okkervil River in the grassy grounds of the Tean French Legation; André "Bad Motherfucker" Williams, flanked by erotic dancers, and the chill-inducing Bon Iver. SS

"A heady blend of backwoods raunch and spaced wonder."

FRIDAY 14 was the hottest March day in Austin since records began. I escaped the sunbaked, maddening crowds of 6th Street by heading north to a dingy, 150-capacity bunker (the oddly named United States Art Authority) for Kemado Records' SSSW Jam. This low-key, afternoon soiree boasted free beer, free trainers and free music by special guests Howlin' Rain (more on them later) plus defiantly old school metal.

First up were latest signings Children: a bass-free (it's all the rage these days) and a recurring theme at SSSW this year) prog-thrash trio and self-described "riff appreciation society". They didn't disappoint, acrobatic Jonny Rad and Skyler Spohn indulging in hours of synchronised finger-tapping, the former even managed to down a can with one hand while playing a solo with the other. Saviours' blackened sludgecore split the difference between no-frills NWOBHM and US hardcore, while local heroes The Sword merged Sabbath-heavy anthems with the widescreen attack of imperial plane Metallica.

The biggest free party was Saturday's 8,000-capacity Meas With Texas event: an all-day, all-ages *Monotonic* featuring 30 bands and top comedians (Jemaine Clement, Eugene Mirman) across three stages in downtown Waterloo Park. City favourites White Denim aired the walk-wal-lowing grooves that won them Best New Band at the Austin Music Awards.

Solo Pop sludge kings Pissed Jeans and garage punker Jay Reatard brought the noise, while Tino Gallardo swayed through majestic Americana and Yeasayer served up the sweetest, worldbeat-infused cosmic pop. Seattle moodists Fleet Foxes, meanwhile, made their own baroque mark (see Mid-Term Report starting on page 72).

Looking lean and tanned, Rocket From The Crypt veteran John "Speedo" Reis led his new combo The Night Marchers through a whipcrack set of genre-baked punk'n'roll gems. They followed two of San Francisco's finest exponents of neo-psychodelia: Wooden Ships, whose monochordal, organ-powered drone epics sounded even trippier in the 80° heat, and the mighty Howlin' Rain. The latter's Allmans-via-Jes roots-prog jams were a personal festival highlight: such a heady blend of backwoods raunch and spaced wonder that I went to see them again that night, blasting wild and righteous at their official label showcase. But then, this is SSSW—the only place where you can see bands 24 hours a day. *JA*



Would like to meet: stunning Jim James (main pic); anticlockwise from far left: Okkervil River; Eli "Paperboy" Reed; Duffy; Fuck Buttons at the MOJO Barbecue; Pissed Jeans.