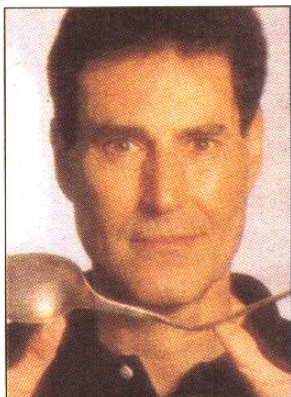




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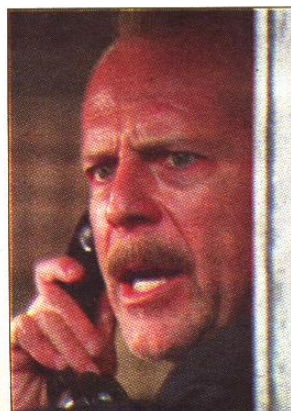
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EROTIC: Voodoo Vaudeville features a good deal of 'scantly clad women performing fan dances

Varieties of sa

A new, darker and sexier version of music hall has risen from the ashes of vaudeville and is on its way to Reading. **VICKY HUNTLEY** talks to Chris Cresswell, the master of a motley crew of troubadours leading the revolution

CABARET dancers, ventriloquist acts and acrobats are all things most people would associate with old time music hall. But today, in the 21st century, the genre has been experiencing somewhat of a renaissance, with variety shows and touring companies popping up all over the country.

Voodoo Vaudeville, which comes to Reading's South Street on Saturday (29), mixes the ethos of Victorian Gothic with the beauty of burlesque and the spirit of music hall, blending cabaret arts, physical theatre, comedy and dance.

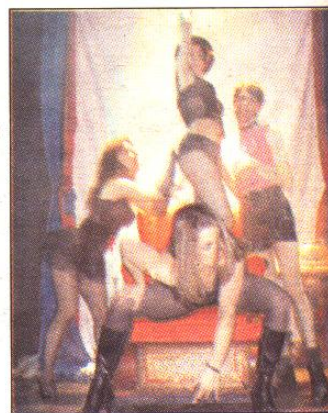
With a background in the circus, director Chris Cresswell steers his assorted band of barnstormers through their various offbeat acts, linked by a storyline.

Hosted by a twisted and murderous master-of-ceremonies, the cast of dancers, performers, comic characters and subversive puppets perform the comedic tale of lust and beauty with a hint of freak-show that grows more sinister as the night goes on.

Dark figures stalk the shadows in *Voodoo Vaudeville*, a performance of bizarre cabaret, black comedy and contemporary dance.

The show has been resident at Brighton's Komedia theatre for the past five years – the kind of place you would expect to find scantily-clad women performing fan dances behind back-lit screens – but Chris says Reading is ready for Voodoo.

"This is our second tour," he explains. "And we're finding people really love it. It's something new in theatre, something totally different. It attracts a wide range of people, not just people



ADULT: The modern show is a c

takes on variety. We've got a nasty puppet called Baby Warhol who speaks. He humiliates people – it's ventriloquism, but not as you know it." Theatres specialising in vaudeville are becoming increasingly popular in today's Britain – London's Brick Lane Music Hall recently found itself a new home after languishing for years in disrepair and the Grand Theatre in Blackpool, the national home of

Making it big as the web goes pop

Struggling musician Richard Marshall thought he would never get a lucky break. Now he tells **VICKY HUNTLEY how a new website is opening doors for him**

AFTER 15 years of making dance tracks in a home studio, the fortunes of one of the first unsigned acts to join the new Popworld Promotes website are going from strength to strength.

Bracknell-based trance act Richard Marshall, also known as Marshall's Music, joined the website which showcases unsigned bands in its first week of operation a month ago.

"I have had a amazing response to my music via the website from all over the world," he says. "I had a relatively small following and needed to find a better way to be recognised and increase the online audience."

"I heard about Popworld Promotes launching an online venture for unsigned bands, giving people like myself who are looking for opportunity, the chance to be heard."

The 33-year-old from Oxenhope in

Wildridings first discovered his musical talent when he had childhood guitar lessons but honed his skill when he was a pupil at the Brakenhale School. "I discovered the electronic keyboard at Brakenhale and gradually put the guitar aside in favour of an

instrument that interested me more," he explains. "Simply because it could create a whole song from bass to drums. I then bought my first keyboard from Dixons in Bracknell and never looked back."

"At secondary school I took music as a subject and that is when my interest in electronic keyboard and synth playing accelerated and

my first performance was in front of a packed hall of fellow pupils and parents."

Richard's early inspiration came from 80s synth acts like Howard Jones, Depeche Mode, OMD, Pet Shop Boys and A-ha, bands which prompted him to start up his own venture with friend Andy Jackson.

"We called ourselves Rough Image and often recorded very basic songs at home using a computer to record, sequence and layer the song," he reminisces. "When practicing we would suddenly find ourselves with an audience listening outside, which

made us realise that perhaps our music wasn't that bad after all."

"In those days, everything was recorded on tape. Every now and then we would head over to have the latest song recorded in a professional studio in Bracknell, in hope that perhaps this song could be the one to make us."

"It wasn't unusual for us to write the lyrics to the song en route to the studio."

Fifteen years on and Andy is no longer in the band but Richard says things haven't really changed much.

"The studio keyboard collection has grown significantly since the early band days along with the technology. I'm also working on a new album in my home studio, as well as balancing that with a full time job as a research scientist for Syngenta in Bracknell - which takes up most of my time."

The single *Be OK* currently holds the number 42 slot out of 440 acts on the Popworld Presents website.

Popworld, the iconic Channel 4 TV show, already showcases well-known music talent, alongside interviews and videos and is hosted by off-the-wall presenters who banter and jest. But Popworld Promotes has aspirations to put new talent on the map.

Music aficionados know the internet has become a key tool in helping to promote new talent. Sheffield-based rockers The Arctic Monkeys achieved 363,735 over-the-counter sales during their first week of release after building their fan base solely through live performances and self publishing on the internet.

"I jumped at the chance to join," says Richard. "I really hope that it will make my name and my music more well-known. That's the beauty of it - you know people are listening to your work. Whether they like it or not is up to them but they'll know who you are."

"I think that's the most important thing any musician can do, just try and get their music heard as much as possible. Don't worry yourself too much with trying to make it - make the most of what's available."

The bands featured on the website get points for the number of listens, downloads, and votes they receive so fans can support their

favourite band. The act with the most points each month will appear live on the TV show.

"I really want Bracknell to support me," Richard says "I'd really like it if they logged onto the website and voted for me."

● Listen to and rate *Be OK* by Marshall's Music at www.popworldpromotes.com.

