

# Rocklands

The music scene is alive and well in a small corner of Lewisham



Up-and-coming  
Deptford band  
Officer Kicks

Deptford and New Cross might seem like unassuming parts of London but, when you consider how many bands and musicians have come out of the area, it's obvious that they're hotbeds of musical talent. Big names include Athlete, Bloc Party, Klaxons... and the list is constantly growing.

With such a rich musical heritage, plus a growing reputation for cultivating fresh talent, the buzz around New Cross and Deptford has not gone unnoticed. NME has called it the new Camden, and Time out has compared it with San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district

(synonymous with the psychedelic rock scene in the 1960s). There's even a musical name for the area: Rocklands, so called because of the position of Lewisham, New Cross and Deptford across the river from Docklands.

'People are always saying to us it's so different,' says Caffy St Luce, a promoter with local enterprise the Music Tourist Board. 'I had friends come down from Manchester and they said: "We're going to tell everyone this is the only bit of London worth going to!"'

Many up-and-coming bands take advantage of the affordable living in the area, which has created a

buzzing collective of musicians and artists. 'It's not one of those communities where you've got to be part of a clique,' says Caffy. 'It's just so down to earth, full of artists, students and people from all over the world.'

Jamie Scallion, lead singer with up-and-coming band Officer Kicks, feels the same strong pull to the area. As well as meeting the other members of his band in a local school, Jamie spent over two years in his late teens as head promoter at The Amersham Arms and what was then The Paradise Bar (now the Royal Albert) a well-known venue where bands such as Blur and Oasis

played in the early 1990s. Now the band – lauded by MTV as combining 'the attitude of Kasabian and the punch of Kings of Leon, a band going places' – are making their presence felt far beyond Rocklands. They played at Glastonbury this year, made it onto Xfm's playlist and played gigs across Europe. And yet, despite Officer Kicks's increasing success, Jamie says: 'Always the most wonderful thing is to play in New Cross, Deptford or Lewisham because it's our home town'.

And there are plenty of places for them to play. From the newly renovated Amersham Arms, to the Birds Nest and Bar Sonic in Deptford and the Fox and Firkin in Lewisham, fans can find all kinds of music, whether it's jazz, ska, rock or indie – 'anything you can think of, people are doing it,' says Jamie. The New Cross Inn even recently made *The Guardian's* top ten of live music venues in London.

Another local band currently being feted is The Shortwave Set, who hail from Deptford. Not only did they recently play at Massive

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Attack's Meltdown Festival at the Royal Festival Hall, but they managed to snag producer-of-the-moment Danger Mouse, behind big names like Gnarls Barkley and Gorillaz, for their latest album.

'There's a reputation for New Cross that's reached as far as LA,' says Caffy. 'A Canadian band recently came over and booked into the Birds Nest for a month because they felt that was the most real part of London. And they loved it!'

The area's individual, independent nature can itself be inspiring. 'The unique thing about New Cross is that if you walk down the high street you won't see any big chains,' says Jamie. 'And the bands aren't heavily industry led. We've done everything ourselves – purely DIY.'

This unconventional approach has led to a proliferation of new recording studios, record labels and local radio stations, such as Earwax Radio. There are also key figures like local artist and producer Alexander Wolfe, who worked with Officer Kicks on their recent album *The Six*

*Grand Plot*, which was recorded in Noel Gallagher's Buckinghamshire recording studio. There are also several local music festivals, such as Artful and the Deptford X.

Rocklands' 'open door' policy means it's easy to get involved in the scene, whether you want to party with local bands, film performances or organise music events. Laurel Sills, Activities and Services Officer at Goldsmiths Students' Union, says students at the college are especially keen to take advantage of this, with many running their own club nights in Deptford and New Cross.

'There are so many young people in New Cross from Goldsmiths and other campuses like Camberwell,' says Laurel, 'and we've got such a diverse student body. At the union you'll always find a night you want to go to.' In fact in recent years, the union has seen star appearances by big names including Graham Coxon, Metronomy and Roni Size. There are even two volumes of a compilation CD called *Made in Goldsmiths*, which is full of local talent.

Rocklands seems set to keep its rhythm for many years to come. 'It's soaring higher and higher,' says Jamie. 'There are some really good bands starting to break through – it's really exciting!'



Klaxons (above), The Shortwave Set (right) and Athlete (far right) all come from New Cross or Deptford

