

Teen sensation wows MK crowd

# Knocking 'em Brown and blue, the boy who would be king

**Oli Brown at The Pitz Club, Milton Keynes**  
Review by [Alan Candy](#)



"SEATS? We don't do seats." This was my introduction to The Pitz Club at Milton Keynes. My mobile phone was out of credit and I had an hour to kill before the main act started.

I wasn't too fazed. Because last Saturday (March 7) I had come to see the new young Messiah of the blues-rock world – Oli Brown (pictured).

First I had to endure, sorry I mean enjoy, the supporting Silver Brazilians. "We play rock'n'roll" was their war cry, and so it proved. Solidly, for about half an hour, very loudly with a wall of noise that made the lead singer's strangulations irrelevant – he simply couldn't be heard. But they did warm us up and broke the ice on a cold Saturday night at the Woughton Centre.

Blues god Oli appeared smack on 9.15pm, resplendent in pin-stripe trousers and waistcoat, white shirt with sleeves rolled up and snazzy black and white patent leather shoes, all set for the latest adventure on his current UK tour.

Was this really the new Hendrix? Britain's answer to Eric Clapton? Oli looks so fragile, so young. At 19 he hardly looks like he shaves yet and Oli exudes a cheerful innocence way out of keeping with the stereotyped image of the hardened bluesman.



But it only takes a sprinkling of notes to sharply realise that here is an extraordinary talent – a mesmeric brilliance that is about as rare as hen's teeth.

Oli plays it gentle, Oli soars, Oli's lightning quick, or as laid-back slow as he can let it out. He mixes it up from whisper quiet to up there with the gods in the twinkling of an eye, so fast we can hardly draw breath between phrases.

Some notes are so extraordinary that the audience spontaneously applauds them and when Oli starts playing, they move as if drawn by a magnet to the front of stage to see just what the heck is going on here, a bit like watching a conjurer and wondering what the trick is. In the tradition of many great combos, Oli's band is a three-piece, with the excellent Fred Hollis on bass and Simon Dring keeping it all

together solidly on drums. They're a potent force, very tight, and Mr Brown has an effortless empathy with Hollis, particularly on vocal harmonies.

Yes, Oli can sing with plenty of feeling – and in a modern way that goes down well with young audiences – and the sound is set up so well that every syllable is audible. The band has recognised early that less can be more when talent like Oli's is on show, dazzling all and sundry.

During the two 45-minute sets, the band covered most of their debut album **Open Road (Ruf records)**, most of which are written by Oli himself or in collaboration with Hollis and Dring.

Of these, Played By The Devil and Stone Cold (Roxanne) were stand-out examples, but in truth anything Oli touches turns to gold, simply because of his dexterity, originality and sheer raw talent. Whatever he attempts on his hand-built Vanquish electric guitar (he has his own signature model already) always comes off, thanks to his sureness of touch and subtle feel for the music. A guitarist not playing a Stratocaster? That's news in itself.

His empathy with the blues, a music that originated well over 100 years ago, is frightening in one so young. He simply seems to have been born to play it, although lining up beside such luminaries as Buddy Guy, Walter Trout and Taj Mahal, some of the stardust has obviously rubbed off.

After he gave them a run for their money, these guys must have realised just how much this British teenager has got. I've heard old blues warhorse Walter Trout live, for example, and I can tell you I wouldn't walk over the road to see him again. Too many notes too loud (Trout's own words) sum him up and the formula sounds so tired up against a fresh talent like Oli's.

Oli Brown is fast finding a following worldwide and it can't be long before he's acknowledged as the number one in his field. One day, maybe people will say: "I saw him at The Pitz Club in Milton Keynes. Even then, he was sensational."

[Oli's website](#)

[Ruf records](#)