

# GUARDIAN

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<http://music.guardian.co.uk/live/story/0,,2056458,00.html>

Kate Walsh: Electro Acoustic Club, London

"I come from a little place in Essex called Burnham-on-Crouch, and I have to be careful with what I say here," says 23-year-old singer-songwriter Kate Walsh, before rapidly abandoning that policy. "It's a pretty town, but the majority of the people are - well, they're a bit shit."

Having felt out of place in her provincial hometown, Walsh fled to Brighton. The relocation has proved productive. Last year, she recorded a winsome second album, *Tim's House*, in a friend's bedroom and persuaded iTunes to stock it; this week, it leapt to the top of their download chart, displacing such goliaths as Take That and Kaiser Chiefs.

This status is ironic as Walsh is no Lily Allen-style, street-wise zeitgeist-surfer: she did not even own an iPod until Apple presented her with one this week. Hers is a more classicist muse, favouring folk-tinged, semi-acoustic, spectral ballads leavened with a delicate purity and gentle intensity.

In truth, the album can be underwhelming, but Walsh's poised charm lends her fragile material far greater impact live: her halting vocal evokes the more rueful reveries of Joni Mitchell. She favours autobiographical material, and *Talk of the Town* returns to the topic of being the victim of local gossips in her dreaded Burnham. It's surpassed by the charged *Tonight*, a gorgeous bruise of a song that recalls Dylan's 1960s Greenwich Village guiding muse, Karen Dalton.

Her material is samey, yet Walsh holds this intimate venue rapt throughout. She may find larger arenas harder to crack, but for now the buzz around this engaging fledgling talent is patently justified. Essex's loss is everyone else's gain.

· At the Great Escape festival, Brighton on May 17. Box office: 0870 040 0076. Then touring.

-Ian Gittins