

# artsreview



## Later...with Heavy Load

**Annie Makoff** checks out the band behind a campaign to keep disabled people up late

If you haven't heard of Heavy Load yet, you soon will. The thrash-punk band with high-energy vocals may be about to explode at a venue near you.

But Heavy Load is not just any punk band: it is a band with a mission. Its members met over 12 years ago at their Brighton care home with the help of support worker Mick Williams (guitarist and vocalist). But this gentle nature-lover and bird

watcher, together with guitarist and vocalist Jimmy Nichols, extrovert vocalist Simon Barker, quietly outspoken drummer Michael White and bassist Paul Richards – also a support worker, and a later arrival – all share the same ambition: to be really rock 'n' roll.

Fed up with having to play early gigs, the band is now at the centre of a new campaign, Stay Up Late, supported by Mencap and the MP Ivan Lewis.

"We are trying to encourage people with disabilities to stay out late," Michael White explains. They had noticed that people disappeared from their gigs early in the evening, when carers went off duty. "I was annoyed," he adds. "I thought, this is not fair. We want to stay out, we should be able to do this."

Stay Up Late aims to spread the message to carers and social workers that people being supported should have an active role in writing their rotas, and

that shifts should be made more flexible.

*Heavy Load*, the documentary, which has been shown nationwide since October, highlights some of the care system's failings as it follows the band in its quest for fame.

Paul Richards believes that the documentary helped raise the band's profile in the media and forced others to take it seriously, but he insists that describing themselves as a 'disabled punk band' is not a marketing gimmick. "We never formed as a social experiment," he says. "It is a statement about who we are."

Others have been unable to see past the disabilities. "One guy said it would be nice for us to play to our friends," recalls Richards and remembers when they were asked to "turn it down": "You wouldn't ask The Who to turn it down!" he says.

But Heavy Load wants to bring about a shift in public perception of disability. As White says, "you are going to think the world of us." Maybe we already do.

• Heavy Load's track "Stay Up Late" is available now for download from [www.stayuplate.org](http://www.stayuplate.org)