


A happy return for the Wonder Stuff

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By Jim Emery

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Jim Emery meets Wonder Stuff guitarist Miles Hunt on the eve of a very special anniversary date.

The last time Miles Hunt played at Glastonbury, the tickets cost just £28 and his band were given equal billing with The Grand Theatre of Lemmings and The Norfolk Mountain Rescue A-Team.

Twenty years later, the latest incarnation of his group, The Wonder Stuff, found themselves in a headlining scrap with The Boss, no less.

“Bruce Springsteen was on the main stage this summer when we played the Avalon stage,” Miles sighed, “Which was ironic because out of the whole bill, the only other person I wanted to see was Springsteen. But the audience were amazing. The tent held about 6,000 and then it was about 40 deep all the way around.”

This is typical of the success Hunt has enjoyed in what he describes as his busiest and best year since his heyday when The Wonder Stuff regularly bothered the Top 40.

The icing on the cake will be a 20th-anniversary airing of their entire second album Hup and the singles and B-sides from that period on December 17 at Birmingham’s O2 Academy.



Jim Bob from Carter the Unstoppable Sex Machine, Dave Sharp from The Alarm and Dirty Ray and Timothy Parkes will provide support on three stages, as well as as well as special guests who were announced this week.

The band has chosen to extend the homecoming theme and invited current local-lads-made-good, The Twang, who are big fans of their hosts. The feeling is

reciprocated. "They are from Birmingham, they're younger than us and they are really exciting." Hunt enthuses.

This exceptional year has seen Hunt play Europe, the United States and Japan as well as a five-week support slot across England and Wales with an equally resurgent Proclaimers. How did he find the Scottish twins?

"They are a real serious bunch of musicians. They took the same six years off as The Wonder Stuff and the vibe I get off them is that they've never been happier."

This feeling is also shared by Hunt although it was not always plain sailing. "It took a line-up change for The Wonder Stuff to be a decent place to be and I think this is the best The Wonder Stuff has ever been," he says.

It was a very rocky road for one of the UK's most popular guitar bands. They nearly split on many occasions and there is still antipathy toward past members. Multi-instrumentalist Martin Bell is described as a "hired hand" and Paul Clifford as "not a particularly good bass player".

However, Hunt only has good memories of recording their "difficult second album".

"We'd been in the States on our first American tour and finished the last date in New York and we were all supposed to get on a plane the next day, go home for a few days, do some laundry, then reconvene in the studio and start on the album," he says.

"Well, of course we met some special new friends in America so we didn't all get the plane ride home. Malcs and Gilksy went back to do their laundry and me and Bob Jones stayed in New York for another week. Nobody knew if we were going to turn up at the studio. We flew back to Heathrow at 7am for the first day of recording, went straight down to the studio and everyone said 'hell, glad you two have turned up' I remember by the time we broke for tea at 7pm, we'd recorded and finished Don't Let Me Down, Gently!"

This relaxed attitude towards the writing and recording process carried on for the next album. Did he ever feel pressure to produce the goods?

"No, none of that occurred to us. We just did what we did last time, we'll go into the studio and (producer) Pat Collier can press the big red button and we'll start doing something and it'll be great and that's exactly what happened."

By the fourth album, the rot had really set in and the band split straight after a triumphant headlining slot at the now-defunct Phoenix Festival, playing to tens of thousands of fans.

“We were always arguing and unless I just shouted and shouted, decisions just never got made. By then, I was sick of shouting and just wanted to knock it on the head. I let it turn into a democracy,” he says.

He doesn't regret anything he did or even said – is coming from the man who was infamous for his forthright views.

“I'm sure I've said some absolute clownish things but it was all said with the energy of a guy who was 25 and thought he was right.

I wouldn't change anything, I'd probably cringe and disagree with it but I wouldn't change any of it because all of that got me to what I can do now and I've never been happier.”

He has settled down with current Stuffies violinist and musical partner Erica Nockalls, playing at their local pub in Shropshire and gaining new audiences as well as delighting the old fans wherever they go. They sell their own CDs to the fans at their gigs and play just about anywhere they are asked to.

“Give us somewhere to plug into and we'll do it!” he laughs. Hunt has embraced the internet and it has reciprocated the love by helping to ensure his diary is always full.

MySpace has been instrumental in getting work for a long time and this year, he finally succumbed to Facebook.

“I saw someone put a bogus one up of me so I thought I may as well do a proper one,” he says. He hasn't found the experience to be a total success, however, “You find there's a reason why you never stayed in touch with some people. ”

So, finally, any other surprises lined up for December 17?

“It could be interesting to have Jedward come up and do Radio Asskiss with us, could be amusing. Dress them up in long wigs like the old Wonder Stuff and get them to sing along.” Inspired. Springsteen would be proud.

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