

Life of Wonder is Miles better



By npowlson damon parkin dparkin@derbytelegraph.co.uk

HE was the snarling frontman whose lyrics served as a caustic commentary on the “loadsamoney” generation.

“Forget your heart, it's your bank I want to break,” sang Miles Hunt, lead singer of The Wonder Stuff, on the band's breakthrough single It's Yer Money I'm After Baby.

Clever, witty, often cynical but always an entertaining live act, The Wonder Stuff enjoyed a string of hits in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including Size of a Cow, Welcome to the Cheap Seats and, with Vic Reeves, the No 1 hit Dizzy. But with triumph came trauma – creative tensions forcing the band to split in 1994 and, again, a decade later – and tragedy: the deaths of former band members Bob “The Bass Thing” Jones and Martin Gilks.

Miles and fellow founder member Malcolm Treece – the band were formed in Stourbridge, West Midlands, in 1986 – are joined by the current line-up for a gig at Derby's The Venue next Friday. Local band Fideal Effect are the support act.

“The Venue is a terrific setting,” says 41-year-old Miles, who performed an acoustic show at the Abbey Street club with The Wonder Stuff's violinist Erica Nockalls earlier this year.

“It's big enough to generate a good atmosphere and small enough so the audience can see the whites of our eyes.”

Miles has performed at a number of Derby venues over the past 25 years, with The Wonder Stuff and as the drummer in an early line-up of cult indie band Pop Will Eat Itself. He also lived locally as a youngster.

“I spent four years in Etwall,” he reveals. “My dad was a Transport and General Workers' Union official who was transferred to Derby in the early 1970s. I went to Etwall Junior School and my brother studied at John Port Secondary.”

Twenty-two years after their first gig, the band are touring again and, in October, celebrate the 20th anniversary of their first album, The Eight-Legged Groove Machine, by performing it in its entirety in London and Birmingham.

The Derby crowd can expect an intimate gig featuring old favourites and new material.

“We're back in rehearsals after a year away,” says Miles, who spent time as an MTV presenter in the 1990s. “But it shouldn't take too long to get back into it – after all, our music is pretty straight forward. We're not performing Bohemian Rhapsody!

“And with members living in Shropshire, Cambridge and New York, there's a great dynamic when we get together because we all have our own lives and other projects.”

They notched up five Top 10 albums, 17 Top 20 singles and played to around a million fans during their heyday. If they enjoyed the success, they also endured sadness: former bass player Jones died of a overdose in 1993 and drummer Gilks was killed in a motorbike crash two years ago.

“When Bob died I wrote the song For Jonesy and I adapted it to For Gilks and Jonesy after Martin's death,” Miles recalls.

When he's not touring with the band, Miles is on the road with Erica, performing their own guitar and fiddle music, or in the studio recording solo material.

“I've managed to make a living out of my first love and while I continue to be able to pay the bills without getting myself a real job, I'm pretty content. I never planned to topple Bowie off his throne but we've had success and some amazing times.



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