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Exclusives

Erica Nockalls

As the most recent member of legendary band The Wonderstuff, violinist Erica Nockalls has brought her own unique style to an already exciting mix of melody and quality songwriting. It's a combination that has seen the songs performed on endless treks around the UK and America from small clubs to the biggest of festivals and one that continues to produce exciting albums and live performances.

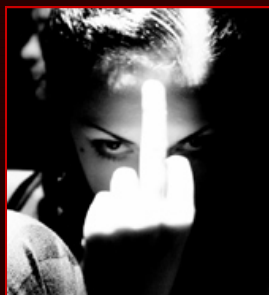
You've just returned from headlining the Avalon Stage at Glastonbury - how was that? Was this the first time you've either performed or attended the legendary festival? Did you get to check out any other bands whilst there?

I emerged from my bunk on The Wonder Stuff's tour bus at 5pm after a monster night of Desparados (tequila beer, for the uninitiated) and Jack D, we had played JB's in Dudley the night before Glastonbury as a warm up and as predicted, we broke ourselves. Apparently, due to the stench of nearby portaloos, when I woke the bus was already parked on site at the festival and baking in 30C heat with broken air con'. Sweating profusely and being forced from a hungover state of semi-consciousness, I ejected myself from the bus, only to find that the back stage area of the Avalon stage was one hour's walk away from my current location. This was my first time at Glastonbury and the well documented size of the thing made me feel uncomfortable, though after playing at Wychwood Festival with the band the month before, I knew the Goan Fish Curry stand was going to be there and so that thought perked me up. We were to take the stage at the same time as Bruce Springsteen (the only other band I actually wanted to see) and so my hopes weren't high for our own crowd attendance. I was proven delightfully wrong as a 5,000 plus audience for The Wonder Stuff welcomed us with the greatest roar I've ever heard. Glastonbury ended up as my favourite Wonder Stuff gig to date and I can't wait to go back there.



How did you originally come into contact with The Wonder Stuff? How familiar were you with the band prior to that?

I enjoy telling people that Miles and I met through a crochet internet forum. The reality is I was studying the violin at the Birmingham Conservatoire and to make some much needed beer money, I took the initiative to go busking in Stratford-Upon-Avon. I made pretty good money playing to tourists and The Wonder Stuff's producer walked past and 'spotted' me. I wasn't approached right there and then, but a month later I had a chance meeting with their producer at Hockley Street Studios where I used to rehearse with my progressive metal band, Fireswitch. Miles gave me a call, he mailed a CD to my Bearwood student address and invited me to audition. I didn't really know who The Wonder Stuff were, other than they had a song about a cow, and so it was with mild trepidation that I agreed to attend. I later found out that I'd got the job within the first two minutes of plugging in... the rest is history!



How much freedom do you have to interpret the older material? Or do you try and keep it as close to the original as possible?

As soon as I walked into the audition room, Miles made me a cup of tea and offered me a double chocolate chip cookie. One of the first things he said to me was "make the music your own" and that immediately put me at ease, especially since I recall saying that I didn't really like the violin part to 'Cartoon Boyfriend' and so I didn't really bother to learn it. My unassuming yet nonchalant attitude seemed to be the start of a successful and productive musical relationship. I do try and think of Fiddly's parts (the previous Wonder Stuff fiddle player) as blueprints, something to base the ideas on. As players we both have an incredibly different style and it wouldn't suit me to try and imitate every violin move he made, so I don't. I do my own thing.

Last year you completed a US Acoustic tour alongside Miles and Wayne Hussey? How was that experience compared to shows over here in the UK? Any favourite places?

That US tour had the potential to go so wrong, having not really said more than two words to Wayne Hussey before and not knowing how we would all fair as 'road buddies' for five weeks. Wayne met up with us in the Yaffa Cafe, NYC in order to acquaint ourselves and have a little pre-tour drinky. A few hours and a \$600 bar bill later, we were the best of friends, both sharing a penchant for good wine and champagne cocktails and bourbon and whatever else the big apple could throw at us!

I wanted San Francisco to be my favourite place as that's somewhere I've always wanted to visit, however, our schedule was so extreme that we arrived when it was dark. We played the gig and



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then left an hour later, also in the dark. Our touring vehicle was leant to us by Milo's friend who owns a motor marketing company. The bus we were to tour the 9,000 miles across the States was unfortunately completely wrapped in Katy Perry artwork. Touring the US is largely good, but I don't get chased down the street here in the UK by the public mistaking me for the lovely Katy Perry.

Do you have a preference to doing acoustic or full band shows? The stripped down version of 'On The Ropes' sounded great on one of the YouTube clips I saw.

I like to play both types of shows in equal measures, they both have their good and slightly less good sides. When you're on stage with the band, there's a lot less focus on you performing as an individual and more attention directed towards how the band sound, look and interact with each other as a group of musicians. When Miles and I play our acoustic shows, the stage barrier has been taken away and you're playing is a hell of a lot more exposed. One thing I enjoy the acoustic vibe when it's just Hunt & Nockalls is that we have an almost psychic ability to perform together instinctively and so it's a more 'musical' experience. I'm happy to do both acoustic and band shows because our own and The Wonder Stuff's songs stand up in either situation.



You're set to release a new album with Miles. How did this differ from the recording of 'Not An Exit'? Any other thoughts on the album?

'Catching More Than We Miss' is our second duo album and we're both in agreement that we like it more than 'Not An Exit' because we now have a better understanding of what we were trying to achieve! It's a more coherent sounding and a slightly more daring album with a fair bit of unusual violin playing and arrangement techniques... and by that I don't mean any thing avant garde (roughly translated as 'bollocks'), I mean 'they don't teach this shit in music school' kind of unusual. 'Catching...' also sees a debut vocal performance from yours truly on a track entitled 'Plans In The Sky'. I was drunk when I wrote my part, slightly tipsy when it was recorded and I'll definitely be hammered if I ever find myself singing it live! It's a swash buckler, it can't be done sober! Also, if I hadn't played on this album and a friend played it to me, I'd definitely buy it. It's a pleasing listen.

Can you tell us a little about Nemesis and how that group came about? What other songs are in your set other than those previews on your MySpace?

Ah, my rock 'n' roll string quartet! This came about after playing in string quartets at over 100 weddings to people who weren't listening and hired us solely as status symbols. The tedium of playing wedding standards eventually started to grind me down a few years ago. As my eyes would wander around churches and wedding breakfast rooms, I'd know full well that the wedding guests didn't want to hear JS Bach's 'Air on a G String' anymore than I wanted to play it. I'm on a mission to set the music of metal and rock bands to a string quartet forum and perform it as such, as some of the good stuff has as just as much musical merit as some Mozart Divertimenti. I'm essentially throwing two fists of rock horns in the face of the classical world, having been often disparaged and being told that "rock will get you nowhere" by professionals. I'm currently arranging 'Vermilion' by Slipknot and I've just finished a sweet arrangement of The Wonder Stuff's 'Red Berry Joy Town'! Mr Hunt himself even took his hat off to my efforts!

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www.myspace.com/lovenemesis



The violin is somewhat underplayed in mainstream music and I'm guessing maybe hard for violinists to break out from the classical genre - do you have a particular take on this?

If you have a good enough imagination, you can achieve anything. If you weren't born with such a creativity, it's commonplace to blame everything and everyone for not arriving at your preferred destination. I don't agree that it's hard for violinists to 'break out' from the classical genre, if anything it's more difficult to 'break in', being as it's a largely pompous, elitist, old fashioned and sown-up grey world. The were two reasons I attended the Conservatoire, to learn how to play the violin to a professional standard and to meet other musicians to form a band with, which is exactly what I did. When I was studying, I quickly realized that I didn't want to pursue an orchestral career and play a someone else's choice of back catalogue over-heard classical standards, nor did I want to practice any more for hours every day and socialize with people I knew I had nothing in common with. I digress,... string sections are used all over pop and guitar based rock music (an effect I usually condemn as 'the kitchen sink approach'... think of most Manic Street Preachers songs, for example) so there's definitely no



shortage of non-classical work if you have a mind to look for it. The few violinists playing in bands that have made a name for themselves are in the lime light because they have a unique playing style, not because they have tried deliberately to be non-classical.

You've guested on stage with The Proclaimers in the past... any plans to that on the upcoming UK Tour this fall?

Last year after Miles and I had supported The Proclaimers for one show, the twins asked me to guest live on their heart-wrenching anthem, 'Sunshine on Leith' at Edinburgh Castle. They complemented me by saying that they liked the way I played in tune, and I appreciated their honesty! I have always loved the city of Edinburgh, the castle in particular, but never thought I'd take the stage there to an enthusiastic 10,000 crowd. The Proclaimers have since asked Miles and myself to support their monstrous UK tour in Oct/Nov 2009, and I will be joining them once again for 'Sunshine on Leith'. Mr Hunt and I are looking forward to performing our songs to a different audience in some fantastic venues.



As this is TrashPit and we're fans of everything Hard Rock / Hair Metal / Glam Rock!! Any dodgy yet totally brilliant rock records in your collection?

Miles and I live together in Shropshire and we have the lounge as a studio. As a result, the house is constantly full of music whether we're writing, recording, or mixing. I'm often found in the kitchen cooking up something spectacular (I'm quite a passionate cook) with a glass of something lovely in my hand, singing/shouting along to something Miles would undoubtedly title as being 'dodgy'. Most recent chef anthems have been Def Leppard's 'Slang' album, a bit of Type O Negative's 'October Rust', some NIN and a dash of Maiden for good measure... the perfect recipe!

For more information visit www.myspace.com/ericanockalls or www.myspace.com/the_wonder_stuff

Erica and Miles are touring as support to The Proclaimers throughout this October.

Many thanks to Erica for taking the time to give such great answers!



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