



## THE WONDER STUFF - London Forum - December 2000

Written by Mark Reed  
Wednesday, 19 May 2004

Old rockers don't die, they just reform....

Forget all the crap you've been fed by the *NME/Melody Maker* and all their ilk, about whose cool, whose not, whose hip, whose not. Forget that the definition of indie has been diluted into nothing more than white boys with guitars playing stadiums and feeling persecuted, man. Forget the wicked lies and all the shite they say.

The current crop of Indie stars - and you know whom I'm talking about here - are basically braindead morons, ugly on the inside. Misanthropic, talentless fools with no vision. Stand up **Kelly Jones**, stand up **Billy**, stand up **Liam**. These people have devalued 'indie' - which stands for independent by the way - into a form of 'cool' conformity. 'Indie' has been diluted and debased to cover all manner of terrible music crimes, and so that we feel like we're all rebels. Bollocks. If the best we can manage is crap like **Coldplay** and **Toploader**, the products of the three minute attention span generation, I make no apologies for wanting to return to my youth when music actually had content and mattered. **Coldplay**, **Toploader**, and their ilk and all the products of the weak sperm of unthinking TV-dripped fools. You can disagree with me if you like, but you're wrong, you'll always be wrong, and there's nothing you can do to change that.

As magazines fall off the face of the earth, tied forever into chasing acts who shift 'units' to shift papers, the vision contracts into nothingness. There is only one choice now - **NME**. They become self-appointed arbiters of cool. And this week you are being told to like American bands with tattoos and dodgy facial hair, going under names such as **Third World Hate Club** and **Linkin Bizkit** playing stadiums with inflatable robots, proclaiming that nobody understands them, that everything is fucked up, and that the biggest currency is hatred, pathetic self-loathing, and then retiring to their mansions whilst running their multimedia empire of film, music, and t-shirts.

Next week, by the way, you're being asked to like visionless thoughtless imbeciles with names like the **Stereophonics** and producing instrumental albums of self-pitying codswallop.

Forget all of this crap, and open your ears to music that's actually good. These days the market is targeted at people who can make decisions no more complicated than to choose **Pokemon** or **Westlife**. Records are no more than advertisements for the maker - to ensure that **Ronan** or **Elton** or whoever makes the papers and stays famous. Hoping to grin inanely and not actually say anything. Mute heroes are the best kind - question nothing, stay asleep.

Every band reforms. The **Sex Pistols** did it, to get the money. The **Happy Mondays** did it, to get the money. It wasn't reforming as in "we're good now". It was reforming, like processed meat. Offcuts thrown together to create a plausible whole. What's left of the **Happy Mondays** shows just how desperate Shaun Ryder is to pay his tax bill - the last show they played just featured the original drummer and a comatose singer, with a last minute substitute Bez in a hockey mask (a grinning talentless lucky moron if there ever was one), no Rowetta, a last minute stand in bassist from the **Seahorses**, the keyboard player from **the Farm**, and the guitarist from the **Paris Angels**. Oh dear. Ever feel like you've been cheated?

Where can you go after you've gathered up all the loose ends and restarted the cash cow to pay the tax bill? Well there's two ways of doing it. Firstly, a shoddy cheap greatest hits album, with the worst versions of the best songs thrown in a bag and jumbled around. Then you suck Satan's pecker, ring up your mates, and form a band. If you can't get any original members, just ring up some session muscians. Use the original name, and hope nobody realises you're a prostitute and a joke. Stand up **Shaun Ryder**. Some people don't care too much as long as they can hear the songs again, and some people don't care just so long as they've got an autocue and a paycheck.

Or you reform the band. Properly. Of course, every band splits up for a reason and often there's a personality difference in there, so not everybody wants (or is wanted) to return to the fold. When **Neds Atomic Dustbin** reformed, for example, I don't think they even asked their old bassist. He doesn't apparently even like to talk or think about the band, though he seems happy enough to cash the royalty cheques. Let him enjoy his job at the RAC instead. **The Wonder Stuff's** old bassist? Well, he wasn't very good, and nobody particularly liked him. So you take out what caused the band to split up in the first place and add somebody who wants the job.

And this brings us to **The Wonder Stuff**. Reformed for 5 sold out nights to some 14,000 people in London with barely any publicity and no interviews until the shows had sold out. And 2 extra shows at the bands old haunt, Dudley JB's. Now, when bands reform, there's normally one incentive. Cash. So lets do the sums here. approx 16,000 tickets at £15 each = gross returns of £250,000 plus t-shirts. And since it's guaranteed that they aren't receiving the entire of that gross income, it seems sensible to suggest that they aren't just in it for the money.

The fans of this band don't care about what's 'cool', 'hip' and 'trendy'. History has been unkind to the band - they have been overlooked in critical circles by people chasing the elusive X factor of what's cool. But **The Wonder Stuff** were / are cool because they don't care - not about the *NME*, not about what you think, and not about what anybody else reckons. A reformed band chasing the cash cow normally performs perfunctory sets, as short as possible, with all the songs in the same order, every night. It's like watching cabaret. A soulless sausage machine.

But not **The Wonder Stuff**. Each set is an average of 2 hours (or 28 songs) and they've rehearsed somewhere in the region of 40 songs, which means that most nights you never know what you're going to expect, or when for that matter. "Don't Let Me Down Gently" could be the 2nd song, or stuck in the middle, or the last encore. There's no guarantee that they play anything you want to hear, but then again, they've always done exactly what they wanted, whenever they wanted, and perhaps that's why they were and are so loved.

Still, when you've got one of the best drummers in the world - Martin Gilks - who is wasted at anything unless its behind a kit, and a man who only Stephen Perkins from **Jane's Addiction** comes close to, and one of the most talented musicians ever in Martin Bell - a man who could play any instrument you give to him, and one of the best, most spitefully talented frontmen there is in the shape of **Miles Hunt**, oh yeah, and a guitarist who knows that to be good you don't have to smother everything in guitar histrionics, and a great bassist in the shape of Stuart Quinnell, what do you expect?

I've seen every show they've played so far on this tour, and any band this good, this vital can't be in it just for the money.

Saturday 9th December Dudley JB's, was brilliant. I mean, I thought it was brilliant, but then again, I would say that. This band have been missed so much. We've had to make do with second rate chancers and appalling stadium rock for too long. We need a band with wit, fire, and passion. There's been too many self-pitying imposters in the meantime. From the opening, stupid brash pop of *Redberry Joytown* to the last echoes of the shambolic *Good Night Though* they left me speechless. First of all. I.Was. Seeing. The. Wonder. Stuff. I had to say it slow, because I never thought I would again. These songs though, from the passionate *Mission Drive*, to the beautiful *Here Comes Everyone*, struck an inner chord with me that I thought I'd lost forever. I felt both incredibly old and incredibly young at the same time. And My God, they were good. I mean not just good, because we know we're dealing with quality here, but they were amazing. From the fluff of the absurd *Welcome To The Cheap Seats*, via the bristling *Donation* (complete with the best bassline I've ever heard), to the final kiss off of *Don't Let Me Down*, they were simply great. Stuart even told my brother off for reading the set list out to him, and on top of that, the gig was marred by one of the funniest things I'd ever seen. A moronic stage diver leaped off stage, kicked firmly in the ass by Malc, only to land on the floor as the pit cleared out to let him learn a valuable lesson the hard way. Fuckwit.

Second night at Dudley was better. Thought it couldn't be done, but I'm glad I was wrong. Even better. From the worlds best set opener, *Mission Drive*, to the sheer poetry of stuff like *Room 512*, and my personal favourite - the blistering *Donation* - they were just fcuking brilliant. Again, the set seemed to last both forever, and be over in 5 minutes. Fiddly even put his trademark final string chord onto *Here Comes Everyone* - which for me, even though its just one note, seems to make the entire song to me. The absence of stage divers was not unappreciated and those that did try got a firm message from Miles. "*There's only room for one bald arrogant fat bastard on stage, and that's me.*"

Oh yeah, and like normal we got berated for buying records by the **Manic Street Preachers** and **Radiohead** (why not pick the truly excerable offenders such as **C\*ldpl\*y**, **T\*pl\*d\*r**, and **C\*ntf\*c\* Williams** Milo?). I've got bruises and bites and cigarette burns and pulled muscles I didn't even know I had, and my body looks like one big bruise. It's worth it.

Third night. Forum, London. It's a mad crowd, the first 'official' date, and the hardcore have come out to play. Hello, like normal, to the travelling fan posse, who congregate in the pubs near Kentish Town, braving the elements in flimsy shirts to get a quick fix of one of the best bands there ever was, there is, and ever will be. I'm seeing friends I haven't seen for years here, faces I know only from moshpits across the length of breadth of the country. The crowd tonight is far madder than any other, presumably as it's the first 'official' date, and hence the nutters are here. It's been said before, every one of these songs is an absolute classic. From the spunky, punky *Redberry Joytown*, to the shambolic *Dizzy* (**Vic Reeves** is in the building, and my God does he cause a mess) which ends at no set point as Vic, then Miles, then the rest of the band forget how it ends and Vic ends up falling over, singing into a megaphone and generally causing mild havoc like normal. There's even a human pyramid somewhere in that mess. Big Ups to those who manages to help me when the crusty wankers in dreads make a mess of the dancefloor.

Wednesday. Which night was that? I can't remember. Oh yeah, the night Miles promised to play every song off Hup in the wrong order. We almost got it mind you. The opener, *30 Years In The Bathroom* sounds as wonderfully vital as ever thanks to Miles spite, and Fiddly's excellent solo. *Hush* is excellent, even if the beginning is slightly dodgy, and *Can't Shape Up* is 1000% Full On Punk Rawk. I find the Air Guitar Circle and manage to make it through the rest of another excellent gig. *Room 512* is poetry in motion. And Stuart just keeps getting better and better. Only another three nights to go. I haven't been to anything like this before, everyone is everyones best ever mate, everyone is smiling and yelling the words with their hands up in the air, dancing like fools, and hugging their mates. And no drugs either. Well nothing stronger than Aspirin.

Thursday. Well, its' been several jobs, several girlfriends, and at least 5 homes since I last saw **The Wonder Stuff**. Well, before this week at any rate. Everyone may go away in the end, but we've always got the music. How good were they? Well. Very. I must admit, after my brother left the ticket on the sideboard before the gig, necessitating a Tube dash across Central London with seconds to spare, I wasn't in a good mood. But here we are now, entertain us, with the greatest band I've ever seen, yet again, for the fifth night of seven. Even I'm tired, but it's worth it. Highlights of tonight? The audience participation for *Golden Green*, where everyone sings along. The dedication of *Give Give Give* to Russ on his birthday. The tears in my eyes during the incredible *Here Comes Everyone* as Miles sings "*could you love him - and would he love you?*", and the Radio Ga Ga handclaps just like a field in Stratford 6 years and 5 months ago during **Full of Life**. These gigs are getting longer, and all seem to last just the blink of an eye.

There's two more nights to go. Friday 15th and Saturday 16th, where God will wear the big shorts and yell Hup loudly whilst playing Air Fiddle. Friday 15th. Another great night with the best band there is. Four nights into the residency, and six nights into the tour, it's fair to say that we are all feeling the strain a little bit. We all doubt we can keep going, well until the gig starts anyway and it's another night of frenzied dancing yelling and fun seeing the best band there is. The set is another bizarre selection, and like tomorrow night, is being filmed and recorded for the forthcoming VHS / DVD / CD. Tonight I made the decision to see the band, as opposed to merely hear them, and it

was a wonder. Fiddly's wonderful facial expressions alone, all twinkling eyebrows and wicked grins, especially when he teases Milo during the end of *Room 512* are a joy. Malcolm is all over the place tonight, dancing singing and twirling like a dervish. Martin Gilks is again, as ever, the best drummer there is, plain and simple. And Milo, well, he's cool.

Tonight also features the best ever version of the best ever **Wonder Stuff** song. *Donation* is bright and shiny, and burns twice as bright for half as long before it fades into the night. A great big funky rock classic swamped in fiddle, the best bassline ever, and the kind of guitar that slaps you across the face. Just because it can.

"You know when I bring this guitar out you're in trouble don't you?" He teases before *Give Give Give*, and he's right. The entire of London's 'people with good taste' brigade are in full effect tonight, and the community atmosphere - like normal - is ever present. As I pointed out, **The Wonder Stuff** don't have fans, they have friends who happen to like the music. Once again we are all singing, smiling and yelling the words out of tune, and out of time. For the encore, a first for me. I sit out the encore and just watch the band. It is like being 12 again. For the encore, it's a simple 5 song set from a good old fashioned four piece group, and Peter Whitaker can be spotted dancing around the side of the stage before he is required for the breakneck race through *Don't Let Me Down*. Miles even screws up the words to *Unbearable* - "I've been singing this song for 14 years, and I forgot for the first time tonight."

After a quick, flippant *30 Years In The Bathroom*, the joyous and honest *It's Yer Money*, the last and final song is as ever, *Good Night Though* the best song ever about the legacy of a *Stairway to Heaven*.

Sat 16th

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*"I was gonna say this in an interview but I felt I'd wait and say it to you lot instead. I feel sorry for any band which aren't us, because they don't play to any crowd as good as a Wonder Stuff crowd."*

The last night of a great great band. Well, for the time being anyway. An early start at the Forum - stage time of 8.10pm - necessitates lots of rushed drinkage in the presence of the Brum faithful. An energetic set from Serpico featuring Wiz from **MC4** shows that Wiz's hair has neither grown nor shrunk one inch in the past five years. But neither has there been any progression in that time. All animals evolve or die. And so to the **Stuffies**. The seventh night of the seven night tour, and the last of the five night residency sees the band again on firey form. From the 10000% Punk Rawk of *Can't Shape Up*, all frantic and shapethrowing, to the last, definitive *Goodnight Though* that sees Miles strumming Mr. Ian Ware's inflatable guitar playfully, it's a happy-sad end to a great week.

Oddly enough, it's a mad night. From the first song where Malc dodges a can and makes a heroic gesture of *"Ha! Missed!"*, to *Radio Ass Kiss*, where Milo dons a wig and throws it into the crowd... it's a night of absolute joyous celebration. Neil Hannon - not one you'd twig as a Stuffies fan - spends a fair portion of the evening on his own, as indeed does anyone not wishing to spend a final fix in the front rows. Video cameras are dragged into the pit by the crew for shaky handheld footage especially of mad screaming audience members. Ian and his merry bunch have brought inflatable guitars that look ridiculous but play perfectly, and everyone I can see is smiling, laughing and hugging each other. The performance as a whole is fantastic, from the opening trilogy of prototype supercool indie hardcore, as he calls it, when they were playing the Tamworth Rathole. For the first time ever, we are introduced to Mandolin Bell, as for the first time ever, the first instrument Brother Bell picks up is not his inescapable fiddle. *Here Comes Everyone* is again, fluid and beautiful. And, just to freak out the hard core, *Redberry Joytown* is plonked smack in the middle after the nicest song about a ex-girlfriends fat bum ever. *Donation*, as ever, borrows a funky breakdown from **Consolidated's Brutal Equasion**. It's all over too soon, and as a special treat, Mr. Russ Hunt allows Milo to sing *Ten Trenches Deep* just on the mike, as Russ straps on the guitar and plays excellently with the rest of the band. Good man.

Finally, as the main bulk of the set screeches by in a flash of red and blue police lights, whirring noises and funny sounds inside our heads, it's all over far far too soon. *Mission Drive* - the first encore - is brilliant as ever, as is the no-messing breakneck sprint through the remainder of the first encore. It's all against the clock from here on now, with a strict 10pm curfew.

*"I might put myself in horrendous trouble - but this next song is my favourite Wonder Stuff song"* and *Song Without An End*, glides by. *Piece of Sky*, is dedicated to the crap crew, the security, and to us. And then it's the last great song from the last great band I ever heard.

Miles plays the inflatable guitar, teases the audience, and Malc is spinning and jumping and yelling all the words. Finally, the band return to applause, and applause alone, just to say good night though to the faithful few thousand. After the show Miles proclaims that he thought it was shit. He could only be joking, of course. Drinks are imbibed and Stuart is seen stealing chips in the chip shop next door later.

Ever feel like you've been treated ?

Set 9th

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*Redberry Joytown, Here comes Everyone, On The Ropes, Cartoon Boyfriend, Circlesquare, Mission Drive, Golden green, Welcome to the cheap seats, The Size Of A Cow, Sleep alone, Donation, Unfaithful (Miles & Fiddly), Maybe, Caught In My Shadow, Full Of Life, Radio Ass Kiss, Who wants to be the disco king?, Ten Trenches Deep, Sing The Absurd, Unbearable, A Wish away, Ruby horse, It's Yer Money I'm After Baby, Don't Let Me Down Gently, Song without an end, Good night though*

Set 10th

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*Mission Drive, Circlesquare, Cartoon Boyfriend, Here Comes Everyone, Ruby Horse, Golden Green, Cheap Seats, Cow, Sleep Alone, Donation, Room 512, Maybe, Caught In My Shadow, Full Of Life, A Wish Away, Disco King, On The Ropes, 10 Trenches -*

*Sing The Absurd, Redberry Joytown, No x 13!, Give Give Give, Unbearable, Don't Let Me Down, 30 Years, Piece Of Sky, Goodnight Though*

Tues 12th

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*Redberry Joytown, Here Comes Everyone, On The Ropes, Cartoon Boyfriend, Circlesquare, Mission Drive, Golden Green, Cheap Seats, The Size Of A Cow, Sleep Alone, Donation, Unfaithful, Maybe, Caught In My Shadow, Full Of Life, Radio Ass Kiss, Disco King, 10 Trenches Deep, Sing The Absurd, Unbearable, Wish Away, Ruby Horse, Don't Let Me Down, Dizzy (with Vic), Song Without An End, Fishermans Blues - on setlist but dropped, Goodnight Though*

Weds 13th

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*30 Years In The Bathroom, Cartoon Boyfriend, Piece of Sky, Circlesquare, Mission Drive, A Wish Away, Ruby Horse, Hush, Welcome To The Cheap Seats, Don't Let Me Down, Sleep Alone, Donation, Room 512, Maybe, Caught In My Shadow, Here Comes Everyone, On The Ropes, Ten Trenches Deep, Can't Shape Up, Unbearable, No x 13, Give Give Me More, Golden Green, The Size Of A Cow, Sing The Absurd, It's Yer Money, Goodnight Though*

Thurs 14th

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*Mission Drive, Don't Let Me Down, Circlesquare, Here Comes Everyone, Ruby Horse, Golden Green, Cheap Seats, Size Of A Cow, Sleep Alone, Donation, Piece Of Sky, Maybe, Caught In My Shadow, Full of Life, A Wish Away, Disco King, On The Ropes, Ten Trenches Deep, Redberry Joytown, No x 13, Give Me More, Unbearable, Dizzy, Song Without An End, Cartoon Boyfriend, Goodnight Though.*

Fri 15th:

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*On the Ropes, Ruby Horse, Here Comes Everyone, Cartoon Boyfriend, Circlesquare, Mission Drive, Golden Green, Cheap Seats, Cow, Sleep Alone, Donation, Room 512, Maybe, Caught In My Shadow, Full of Life, Give Give Give, Disco King, 10 Trenches Deep, Sing The Absurd (on setlist but dropped as Miles is having difficulty hitting the high notes), No x 13, A Wish Away, Unbearable, Don't Let Me Down, 30 Yrs In The Bathroom, It's Yer Money, Goodnight Though*

Sat 16th

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*Cant Shape Up, A Wish Away, Unbearable, Full of Life, Caught In My Shadow, Here Comes Everyone, Cartoon Boyfriend, Circlesquare, Golden Green, Cheap Seats, Size Of A Cow, Redberry Joytown, Ruby Horse, Sleep Alone, Donation, Unfaithful, Maybe (dropped from setlist), Radio Ass Kiss, On The Ropes, Disco King, Ten Trenches Deep (with guest guitarist, Mr. Russ Hunt), Sing The Absurd (dropped), Mission Drive, No for the 13th Time, Give Give Give, It's Yer Money, Don't Let Me Down, A Song Without An End, Piece Of Sky, Good Night Though.*

The original set list, as planned by Tank before some rejigging from the band was:

*Cant Shape Up, Here Comes Everyone, Ruby Horse, Full of Life, Caught In My Shadow, Cartoon Boyfriend, Mission Drive, Circlesquare, Golden Green, Cheap Seats, Size Of A Cow, Sleep Alone, Donation, Unfaithful, Maybe, On The Ropes, Disco King, Ten Trenches Deep, Sing The Absurd, A Wish Away, Give Give, Unbearable, It's Yer Money, Don't Let Me Down, A Song Without An End, Piece Of Sky, Good Night Though.*

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