

guardian.co.uk

Pop

The Wonderstuff

Monarch, London

3 / 5

Betty Clarke

The Guardian, Thursday 16 September 2004 23.59 BST

A [larger](#) | [smaller](#)

Mention of the Wonderstuff provokes a smirk in anyone over the age of 30. First, there was the grebo scene that spawned them, all long hair and hyper guitar rhythms. Then singer Miles Hunt's Tourette-like compulsion for verbally abusing his peers, poetically expressed in 1988's *Stock, Aitken and Waterman-baiting, Astley in the Noose*. Hit singles *Size of a Cow* and *Dizzy* - and the addition of a fiddler to the band - didn't help. Turning from revered, snotty upstarts to reviled caricatures, when the band split up in 1994, buffoonery and caustic cattiness seemed their likely legacy.

Yet live shows in 2000 proved that, however bittersweet the memories, the band's gift for clever pop still held a pull. Now there's a new album, *Escape From Rubbish Island*.

But founder member Martin Gilks and longstanding bass-player Martin Bell have said that they have "nothing whatsoever" to do with the album, referring to it as a "re-branded" Miles Hunt solo effort. Only Hunt and original member Malcolm Treece remain.

Hunt appears unconcerned, referring to replacement band members as "Wonder Brothers", boisterous as ever, even when lost for between-song banter. "I'm not the cynically prepared bastard you all think I am," he claims.

It's not just perceptions of himself he's challenging. The Wonderstuff were never about maturity but their new direction - big rock chords and gurning - points to a mid-life crisis-crush on Sheryl Crow. Yet they chose the old songs with a careful, revisionist, eye. No big hits, just the power pop of *Piece of Sky* and indie disco exuberance of first single *Unbearable*. The *Animals and Me* with its crunchy bass line is a reminder that the Wonderstuff pre-empted baggy. But it's the 1987 B-side *Ten Trenches Deep* that surprises. Closer to the Futureheads than anything involving Vic Reeves, Hunt snarls,

yells and shrieks through the jagged punk, turning to Treece with a smug smile, reclaiming his past on his own terms.

- At Leeds Metropolitan University (0113-244 4600) on September 30, then touring.

guardian.co.uk © Guardian News and Media Limited 2011