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The Wonder Stuff's Miles Hunt talks to eFestivals Heavenly Planet, Wychwood, and more Friday 27th February 2009

Miles Hunt had just got in from a gig in Stratford Upon Avon, when I interviewed him, part of a tour that had also included London, and Brighton. He and violinist **Erica Nockalls** rarely stop touring although they don't package the gigs as tours, they just play all year around. **The Wonder Stuff** are set to play the forthcoming **Heavenly Planet**, and **Wychwood** festivals. Heavenly Planet will also see Miles perform the 'Shared' project.

When will you next see the rest of The Wonder Stuff?

When The Wonder Stuff get together, because we have to get together to rehearse, and we live all the place, our drummer's in America, and I'm really looking forward to it. Around May, that'll be Wonder Stuff time, and a date that stands out is The Wychwood Festival where we support the Super Furry Animals, that's really cool.



Are you looking forward to seeing them?

Absolutely, I've never seen them but my brother who is also The Wonder Stuff's guitar tech, he's a massive fan of them, and is always going to see them, so he'll be thrilled.

You're also playing the new new Heavenly Planet festival, do you know much about the festival?

Yeah, because I'm friends with Thomas Brooman who is one of the main organisers of it. He was heavily involved in WOMAD, up until last year from the inception of it. It was Thomas' invite to do it. From what I can tell, I think we're the only rock band on the bill.

One of Thomas' ideas is to get each artist to do a cover version or a song with the word 'Heaven' or 'Heavenly' in it, and I think we're going to have a crack at The Psychedelic Furs' 'Heaven', because it's a great track.

I like his ideas for the festival. Also, Erica and I put on a night at Birmingham Town Hall, a couple of weeks ago, called 'Shared'.

Are you taking that to Heavenly Planet as well?

Yes, I believe so. At the moment we've had a couple of conversations with Thomas about it, and it looks like a great idea, we're going to take some players down there that we play a lot with in Shropshire. A couple called Emma & The Professor, and a guy called Timothy Parks who is from Stourbridge and is a great acoustic singer/songwriter, and then have a bit of a line-up, and then once it hits midnight the 'Shared Stage' starts and we go through the night. We're going to try and tempt some of the artists over from the main stage, to come and jam, do covers, and play acoustic.

Are you going to be curating it?

I believe so, yes, I've got a lot of research to do.

Can you tell me more about the 'Shared' project?

Erika and I were offered a gig at Birmingham Town Hall, because they are putting a lot of different things in there now. it was shut for the best bit of a decade if not longer while they refurbished it. The management got hold of us and asked if we wanted to play there. That venue was the very first gig I ever went to when I was 11, I went to see Slade there, so it holds a very special place in my heart. So I thought, let's try and do something a little more

spectacular, than just a Milo and Erica gig.

We were already in contact with Wayne Hussey because Erica and I did a tour of North America with him for five weeks in October, November last year. Just Wayne at the piano and acoustic guitar, and me and Erica doing our set. What started to happen mid tour was that we started to learn and play on each other's songs. So we asked Wayne to do Shared with us, and he was more than happy. He lives in Brazil, so he had to make quite a trip to come over.

Then the rest of them were all done through MySpace. Years and years and years ago I met Roddy Frame and then we'd re-connected on MySpace, and I told him I was putting this gig on, would he be up for it? And he said he'd love to. Same story with Nick Heyward from Haircut 100, and then Katell Keineg, who opened for us. She's based in Wales, she's lived all over the place, and she's had albums out over the last ten years, and I've loved them, and I've never had the opportunity to see her live before. So I thought I'd find her on MySpace and invite her, and she said yes right away.

It was great, pretty nerve racking, as me and my managers were promoters of it, and I'd never promoted anything, as in being responsible for the cash. That was pretty stressful, but we pulled it off, we didn't lose any money, and everyone had a great night. I know all the artists enjoyed it, and expressed an interest to do it again.

We have a list of about fifty other artists that we want to approach, and perhaps do one or two 'Shared' nights, possibly at Birmingham Town Hall again, or maybe choose another city, we were talking about Bristol the other day, or even put a week or two week tour together, although that would depend upon the artists schedules.

I'm really into the touring idea because you can spend more time playing with the other musicians. It's something we're hoping to continue, it won't just be established artists that have been around for a long time, but I want to bring some of the new artists that we've found when Erica and I have been touring, and make it a platform for newer artists as well.

You mentioned filling in with some stories, you're a good raconteur, any chance of you doing a spoken word performance?

I don't think so, it happened by accident really, I'm working on a book about the anecdotes of the last twenty years and I'm trying to tie it all together. I don't think it's something I would do, no.

Are you intending to take 'Shared' to Wychwood?

No, that hasn't been mentioned, at the moment it's just for Heavenly Planet.

You're also playing the Acoustic Festival of Britain and Solfest with Erica, how does playing as a duo differ for you?

Well it's a completely different set list. The Wonder Stuff play Wonder Stuff songs and the majority of mine and Erica's set, we've got a new album called 'Catching More Than We Miss' which we're selling at gigs, but it won't be in the shops. Most of our set will be made up of the last album we did 'Not An Exit' and the new album, and we drop the occasional Wonder Stuff song in, ones that are album tracks, the lesser known ones for our acoustic set. But Wonder Stuff sets are Wonder Stuff sets and we don't play anything but those records.

So you've got new material as a duo, are there any plans for new Wonder Stuff material?

We were just talking about that this morning actually. The thing about that is, all the writing I've done in the last three years has been for mine and Erica's records. So that's the vibe of my writing these days, so I think really if there was to be a new Wonder Stuff record it kind of has to be led by Malc our guitarist. If he got the writing started, and set the tone for whatever the record should sound like, then possibly. Otherwise it will just sound like a Miles and Erica record.

You've been to quite a few festivals over the years, what was your earliest festival memory?

The first one I ever went to was Reading when The Wonder Stuff was pretty low on the bill, that would be '88 I guess, then we did that three times, and the next year we did it we were the main support for The Mission. We did Glastonbury once, but I didn't like Glastonbury, it was 1999 when we did that, and I thought it was too big then, and it's at least twice the size now, and it just seems like a marketing exercise for the big labels and the big bands these days from what I can tell.

You can get away from that there though.

Yes, but I don't like cities I live in a rural place and it just seems like they build a city, and to me my understanding of festivals is the absolute opposite of that, so I think that was a horrible one.

I loved the ones that we did the last time that The Wonder Stuff were doing festivals. Solfest was great, and Erica and I did Wickerman last year, those smaller ones in the more unusual places. Beautiful Days they did a great job with that, I've been there twice, we headline the one night, that was great and it was a nice festival to hang out at and stay all weekend. I quite like GuilFest as well, I've been at GuilFest for the last two years. I like the ents24 stage there, saw Richard Thompson last year headline that, that was amazing. During the afternoon Damien Dempsey, a favourite of ours, an Irish singer/songwriter that Erica sometimes plays with did the ents24stage and I just thought the vibe of that was great.

If you were to organise your own festival, who would you have on the line-up?

It would be a tricky one that, because I don't like much that's contemporary, so I'd definitely like Damien Dempsey on there, probably Sharon Shannon's Big Band, and completely selfishly I'd love to see dEUS again, a Belgian band and their last two albums have been outstanding, I'd make them headliners I reckon. And then my all time favourite band, from when I was a kid, Magazine have reformed. They played their first show in 28 years last night I'm going to see them in London and Friday and then Manchester on Saturday. I would have done them all but I had to keep days open for doing our own gigs really. They are just magnificent really, I'd love to see them, and I think a really good festival band, would be The Waterboys, they've just got so many good songs to them, to lay in the grass on a summer's evening nicely sloshed, listening to The Waterboys would be a good one.

Do you go to many festivals without playing there?

No, I never did, and once we started doing them as performers I never really caught the bug. always connect it with work really, it's a busman's holiday really for me. I'd much rather see bands when they're playing in clubs and theatres. We've got the privilege of our own dressing room and our own toilet, and we're usually got a tour bus, so I can go and have a lie down in the afternoon. I wouldn't have all those luxuries if I just went as a ticket buyer.

Are there any new bands you've come across that have impressed you?

Yeah that new bloke Timothy Parks that I was talking about, he also has a band line-up that he does occasionally. The percussionist and singer Emma & The Professor that come from the Shropshire area, I love seeing them. We have a great pub by us where we all get together and play in regularly. To be quite honest rather than watch tv, or listen to the radio, or buy a magazine I'm a fan of all the people who play in our local pub.

You've just celebrated the 20th anniversary of the first album...

We did just two shows, one in Birmingham, one at Shepherd's Bush Empire in October, but there are more in May, 21st anniversary. They were great we played the album in order, and a bunch of B sides and then played a more varied set for another hour after that. We were on stage for about two and a quarter hours it was great. We're doing five or six more in May, and they'll be brilliant.



interview by Scott Williams

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