

Miles Hunt and the Wonder Stuff in Plymouth (interview)

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With a reputation as infighting rabble rousers, indie pop/rock band The Wonder Stuff took the nation by storm for a time in the early Nineties – hitting the heights with top five singles *Size Of A Cow* and the chart-topping *Dizzy*, featuring a guest appearance by Vic Reeves. They were even more consistent in the album charts and, after their infamous debut album, *The Eight Legged Grove Machine*, dented the top twenty, their next three, *Hup*, *Never Loved Elvis* and *Construction For The Modern Idiot*, went top five.

But theirs was always a volatile set up and they perhaps did well even to survive from 1986 to 1994 albeit with changes to the line-up. Ask main man Miles Hunt how it was for him at the time and he'll tell you: "I was pretty miserable throughout most of it! The Wonder Stuff were famous for not getting on. You know, you start out as a gang of mates with grotty jobs in your teens, all in it together, but by the time you're in your late twenties there have been an awful lot of changes. All I was interested in was putting all my efforts into the band, 24/7 but other members were flitting around doing other things. Over the ten year period, apart from Malc with whom I formed the band – we were just not on the same page. Plus we were all quite mouthy buggers which didn't help!"

He was never comfortable with the trappings of success and the commercialism that went with it. "I found it really intrusive – not being famous, but having to talk business. If I'd wanted to be a businessman I'd have started a market stall." After the break-up he tried out a variety of musical projects, including the short lived ensemble, *Vent 414*, and he spent a further 18 months as presenter for MTV's Europe's *120 Minutes* alternative music show. During this time he put out a selection of solo albums, before reforming the band in 2000. "It felt like the right time to crack it out of the box."

In 2004 they released the first Wonder Stuff album in eleven years, *Escape From Rubbish Island*, and followed up in 2006 with *Suspended By Stars*. "I have to say it is the happiest and most creative period I have experienced as a member of the band. Now, in terms of friendship and musicianship, we have the best line-up ever," he says of latest Wonder Stuff incarnation which features original guitarist Malc Treece, plus Erica Nockalls on violins, Mark McCarthy on bass and Andres Karu on drums.

He is understandably delighted to be still around making music after all this time. "To keep going for 23 years doing the thing I love – and avoid getting a proper job – is not bad going. Plus it's incredible that all these thousands of people have stayed with us. We've been touring the first album and the crowd who have been coming to see us are pretty varied – not just old bald blokes! So many have come up to me, shaken me by the hand and said 'these songs were the soundtrack to my youth'. It brings a tear to my eye!"

The band were even invited back to headline the Avalon stage at Glasto this year. "I didn't like it much when we played there 20 years ago and went there with my usual cynical head on. But I was wrong. Perhaps it was because we didn't go anywhere near the main stage (though I would have loved to have seen Bruce Springsteen, but we were on at the same time!) and there was this really nice vibe – like one of those smaller festivals without all the stupid press, BBC coverage and corporate stuff... The audience was amazing for us. I didn't think we'd have many there as they'd all want to see Springsteen, but to see around 8,000 people singing all your songs word for word was incredible."

Yet despite that reception and others like it around the UK, Miles knows that keeping the band together full time is not viable and he delights in working on his side project, with Wonder Stuff violinist Erica Nockalls. He and Erica toured their album *Not An Exit* relentlessly in 2007 continuing in 2008 Stateside with a co-headlining tour with Wayne Hussey of The Mission. Meanwhile, also in 2008, The Wonder Stuff played a couple of shows to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the release of *Eight Legged Groove Machine*. They went so well, further shows were added early this year.

The Wonder Stuff play the Hippo in Bath Street on August 21, so what can we expect of their set this time? "We'll be playing exactly the same set as we do at Beautiful Days," says Miles. "The band live all over the UK, so when we get together to do a festival, we like to do a couple of other gigs in the vicinity because we love playing live. Nearly everything we do was written in the last century," he says, "and it'll be heavy on the singles..."

Find out more about the band at www.myspace.com/thewonderstuff

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