

ARTS and ENTERTAINMENT

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ARTS IN BRIEF

ALCESTER Arts Circle will be holding an art exhibition at Alcester Town Hall, between 11am and 5pm this Sunday. The Arts Circle has been running for 12 months and now has more than 40 members who will be displaying their work at the exhibition. In addition on Sunday, in conjunction with the Alcester Garden Walkabout, seven of the artists will be painting at times throughout the day, in six of the gardens on show in the town. Half of any profit made from the sale of paintings will go to the Garden Walkabout and the Cancer Research charities. Some work can also be seen at Venue Expresso in Alcester High Street.

STRATFORD'S tenth *Songs of Praise* will take place this Sunday (3rd June) at the Bandstand on the recreation ground in Stratford. The evening will comprise a host of favourite hymns chosen by local residents, played by the Coventry Salvation Army Band. The event, which is free and will last approximately an hour, is organised by Cllr Maureen Beckett and started during her mayoral year. Last year it attracted more than 400 people. Audiences are welcome to take their own chairs.

SINGER Yvonne Evans will be performing with the Tim Ward Jazz Trio this Friday (1st June) at The Bird In Hand pub in Birmingham Road, Henley. The concert is free and starts at 8.30pm. For more information contact 01564 792689.

STRATFORD'S Holy Trinity Church choir is inviting audiences to 'Feast your ears with the music awhile' (*Timon of Athens*) on Saturday 9th June at a special fundraising concert at 7pm.

The concert—the choir's first since 2001—will feature a wide-ranging repertoire, demonstrating the choir's versatility. The event has three aims—to showcase the choir's considerable range and expertise, to attract new members and to raise money for forthcoming tours to Lincoln Cathedral at the end of this year and Europe in 2008.

Andrew Jones, Holy Trinity's director of music, said: "There will be some of the church music for which the choir is well

known, but people who have heard us before will be in for a surprise – it's a very varied programme."

A buffet supper will be served after the concert in the parish centre, with a licensed bar. Tickets (£10 adults, £5 children) are available from the church bookshop or parish office on 01789 266316.

Anyone interested in joining the choir should contact Andrew Jones on 01789 551541 or e-mail: andrew@andrewjones.org.uk

WARWICK'S Playbox Theatre will be staging a special festival to help budding actors under ten-years-old, thanks to a cash boost of a £2,000 donation from Barclays.

The Young Festival will give local children a unique opportunity to participate in a series of productions, visiting companies, open workshops, special guest appearances and the official launch of a café for very young children.

Liane Howard, director of Corporate Alliances for Playbox Theatre Company, said: "This support from Barclays allows us to involve hundreds of local children in an exciting celebration of young people's theatre. We are grateful to Barclays for this opportunity."

Paula Shore-Marston, community relations officer for Barclays, said: "At Barclays we are committed to looking after local communities where we work and live. Playbox Theatre is a great asset to this community and I am delighted we have been able to support them."

The centrepiece of the festival will be a production of Roald Dahl's *The Twits*, directed by Simon Pollard. He said: "Inspired by the outrageous behaviour of certain British celebrities, this production re-imagines *The Twits* for a younger generation—as befits a Young Festival at Playbox Theatre for Young People. You may recognise certain well-known faces in our contemporary realisation of the characters, reflected in costume, music and behaviour!"

The Twits runs for eight performances at The Dream Factory from today (Thursday) until 10th June and is performed by a cast of 36 Playbox members aged eight plus.

Q&A: with Miles Hunt



THE WONDER STUFF'S front man Miles Hunt was at Cox's Yard last week, performing songs from his new album, *Not an Exit*. The Herald's Tim Jones caught up with him for a chat...

What was your musical upbringing?

Dad is a jazz drummer and his brother was in Wizard. When we were kids it was a big deal when Wizard were on *Top of the Pops* and in the charts at Number 1. There was always music in the house and I felt it was something I wanted to do. By the time I was seven or eight-years-old I found things like Slade and T-Rex very exciting. In my teens I was looking for an identity. I was always trying to find something that set me apart. I was a painfully shy kid. I was rubbish at school because I wasn't interested and they didn't do anything to engage my brain. They were trying to get me to conform to something I had no interest in. I think schools are still pretty much the same now, trying to get people to conform. When punk came along I found it to be very honest with the brilliance of such people as Tom Robinson, Joe Strummer, Lydon, Weller—they knew how to express themselves. I saw something in that.

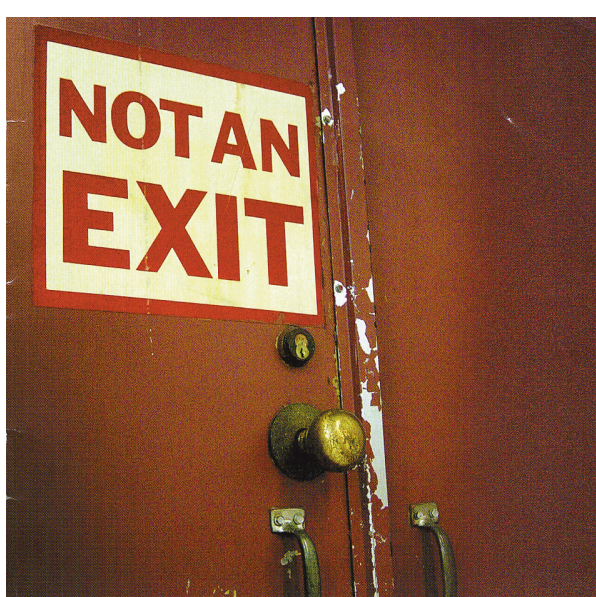
Your lyrics often suggest you're quite angry with the world. Is this the case?

I'm by no means an anarchist but I find most people very apathetic, fully willing to anaesthetise themselves and have pointless aspirations. I, for the past three or four years haven't had a television in the house. I

live in the middle of nowhere on a farm in Shropshire. There's about four other houses in the village and I generally feel better away from other people, particularly in the kind of society we've got. People reading these moron magazines about moron celebrities. It's just utterly ****ing depressing. People waste their lives with pointless aspirations—a new car, holiday and I don't really understand what the other humans are up to most of the time. I don't know how they even draw the breath to lead such dull lives. Maybe go to the library, exercise your mind, read a book that Oprah Winfrey didn't tell you to ****ing read. So yes! Dissatisfaction sums up just about everything I've ever talked about in my songs.

You famously announced the original split of The Wonder Stuff at the Phoenix Festival near Stratford in 1994, on the back of the album *Construction For the Modern Idiot*. The album was much derided but wasn't it one of your finest moments?

We tried a lot of things musically on it. Some of the best moments of The Wonder Stuff are on there. *Sing the Absurd* I still would say is in my personal top five best songs I've ever written. The album's got



some of the best moments, it's all got some of the lowest. *Cabin Fever* was us just trying to repeat *Size of a Cow*. And there's a song on there called *Swell* which is easily the worst song I've ever been involved in.

Which is more important? Lyrics or music?

They're both equally important for me. I am gobsmacked that someone wouldn't listen to a style of music *per se* but usually most of the music I enjoy is vocal. Dance music, techno etc just doesn't interact with me at all. If it does have lyrics they're invariably inane. But also I don't really enjoy music that machines make.

How do you go about writing the songs? Do you write the lyrics first, or instrumentals?

There are no strict rules.

Sometimes I write an entire song on a train, write it as a poem with a melody in my head and then I'll later muck around on the guitar and put it together. Other times I'll spend three months on an instrumental thinking I'm never going to find a melody to go with it. I've got tracks like that I've abandoned. I've even rung up mates to say "can you hear a vocal melody in this instrumental?" Other times I'll sit on the end of the

bed and strum some chords and words.

What books and music do you like or have influenced you?

I've pretty much enjoyed everything by Bukowski. There's also a mate of mine Clint Margrave who lives in California—I like a lot of his poetry. And there's Dave Eggers who's involved in this publishing company in San Francisco called McSweeney's. They're hard-back books, collections of short stories by young writers. There's always one in my bag. If I had to pick a *Desert Island Disc* artist I'd definitely go for Bob Dylan as his body of work is so vast.

The music on the albums is quite complex, yet on tour

it's just an acoustic set. Why? I have to earn a living! It just allows me to put food on the table! I'd love to play with a bigger band all the time but it's just not feasible. When I first starting doing acoustic gigs I wasn't that excited, I found it nerve-racking. I didn't really enjoy it. I preferred hiding behind the shelter of a band. But that was ten years ago. Now I love it.

Why do you do some albums under your own name, others as The Wonder Stuff?

Well, it's pretty obvious with the latest album. The difference is that Malc [Treece] isn't there, and the essence of The Wonder Stuff is mine and Malc's songwriting.

You like to smoke whilst on stage. So how did you get on in your tour in Scotland recently? And what do you think about the forthcoming ban?

I just had to rush through the set as fast as possible! I was like 'I'm ****ing dying for a cigarette, I'll be back in 15 minutes!' Yeah, I'll think I'll retire from public performance when the ****ing ban comes in!

You like telling an anecdote or two on stage...?

Yes, some of them are even true!

And finally, what's next for you?

We've got the Womad festival at the end of July. The rest of the year is going to be with Mark and Malc from The Wonder Stuff and the game plan is that by the end of the year we'll have a new Wonder Stuff album finished and release it in the spring.

Shakespeare and ices: the perfect Sunday?

Report by Sandy Holt

THE Royal Shakespeare Company is offering five-to-nine-year-olds the chance to have fun finding out about the stories behind Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Chekhov's *The Seagull* in a series of special Ice Cream Sunday events this month.

Starting this Sunday (3rd June) and running consecutive Sundays until 24th June a member of the RSC will lead an interactive storytelling session with youngsters. They will summarise the story of the play, before helping the children and their parents or carers to bring the characters and situations to life. And, to round things off at the end of each event, everyone will be able to enjoy an ice-cream.

The Ice Cream Sunday events coincide with the RSC's current productions of *King Lear* and *The Seagull*, which are running in repertoire in the Courtyard Theatre until 23rd June.

Melanie Whitehead, from the RSC Learning Department, said: "Ice Cream Sundays will be a really enjoyable and accessible way for children to explore the plays of two of the world's greatest writers. There will be lots of practical activities, so I'm sure everyone will have a lot of fun."

Ice Cream Sundays are supported by NFU Mutual. Ian Golden, NFU Mutual's group chief executive, said: "I think this is a great initiative to get children interested in the arts at a young age. It sounds like it should be good fun for all the family. I hope the Stratford community will come along to enjoy the events, as well as the ice cream on offer—let's hope we get some good weather!"

Each session begins at 10am and lasts 90 minutes, taking place in the Courtyard Theatre Café Bar in Southern

Lane. Each child must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

For further information and tickets (£1.50 children, £3 adults) contact 0844 800 1110 or visit www.rsc.org.uk

●THE Royal Shakespeare Company has announced that RSC associate artist Penny Downie will be leading the all-female cast as Odysseus' wife Penelope in the forthcoming premiere stage adaptation of Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* in the Swan Theatre this summer.

The actress last appeared with the RSC in David Edgar's play *The Prisoner's Dilemma* in 2001. Her other RSC credits include *The Winter's Tale*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Plantagenets and Romeo and Juliet*. The cast for the production, which is directed by Josette Bushell-Mingo, joins together seven actresses from Atwood's native Canada and members of the existing RSC ensemble from the UK: Mojisola Adeboye, Frances Ashman, Derbhle Crotty, Pauline Hutton, and Sarah Malin will be joined from Canada by Lisa Karen Cox, Philippa Domville, Kate Hennig, Corinne Koslo, Pamela Matthews, Kelly McIntosh and Jenny Young.

The Penelopiad previews in the Swan Theatre from Friday 27th July until 18th August, before going on tour. Tickets are available from the RSC box office hotline on 0844 800 1110.



●Making movies... Stratford International Digital Film Festival directors Samantha Meah, Douglas McFerran, right, and Craig Wilkinson, second from left, are pictured with film makers Scott Rawsthorne and Matthew Sefton at the start of the annual event last week.

W36/5/07/4

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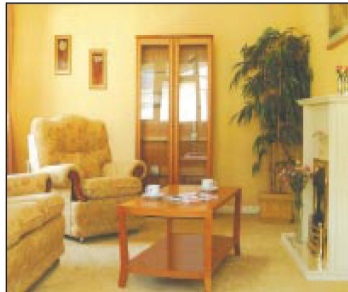
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