

Interview with Andy Powell of Wishbone Ash

Wishbone Ash with original band member Andy Powell plays The Winchester on Monday, May 2.

A career spanning over forty years has kept Andy Powell on the stage, in the studio and playing the guitar. His love for music shows through his ambition and drive to keep things fresh, moving forward and appreciating the roots of the past.

By Helen Marketti

NCV: You were inspired by Cliff Richard's back up band, The Shadows. What was it about them and Hank Marvin in particular that appealed to you?

AP: *The twang! Hank had the twang. He had and still has a beautiful touch and great tone. I suppose I had only heard people play acoustic guitar or jazz guitar up until then. I was about ten years old and just to see a photo of him playing an exotic looking guitar, his salmon pink Fender Stratocaster, was a little taste of the wonders of America. It was that American thing. I remember us young neighborhood kids would make pilgrimages on the train up to London just to catch a glimpse of a Fender in a music store window. Obviously we could never afford anything like that and nor could our parents. So our little group started to make electric guitars at home on the dining room table and in workshops if your father was lucky enough to have one. I made two electric guitars that way, one of which I used in the first years of Wishbone Ash.*

NCV: Were you always interested in the guitar?

AP: *Yes! Right from the first things I heard on the radio; it was always the guitar that caught my ear. The way it could be used so melodi-*

cally and expressively. I remember hearing Django Rheinhardt, the French gypsy guitarist, when I was quite young. That sound, the emotion and humor in his playing. It was sheer joy and absolutely thrilled me. It still does.

NCV: Your music catalog is already extensive. Do you ever write new material for upcoming tours?

AP: *Yes, indeed. We are currently featuring a new song called; Reason to Believe, which has not appeared on CD yet, and we are also featuring a brand new song written for us by someone else. It's called, Can't Go it Alone. Wishbone Ash is very much a work in progress. We don't rest on our laurels so to speak.*

NCV: In regards to the trademark of the twin-lead guitars, it seems to be something that continues regardless of different band members. Sometimes "the original sound" becomes lost in musician transition but Wishbone Ash has kept it strong.

AP: *Speaking for myself, it's kind of in my DNA now. I can only make music and have it come out sounding this way. Not to say that we don't work hard at redefining our sound and experimenting and not to say from time to time we have the need to reference back to things from the past to remind us. Regarding my own*

sound and playing style, I really have no control over that despite all the effects of pedals and amps I have ever tried over the years. I hope it always comes from the heart is all I can say.

NCV: The band members seem to "click well" and make it all happen...

AP: *Well, bassist Bob Skeat has been in the band for going on 14 years so the bottom end of the band's sound is really solid in more ways than one. It took only a short while for him to gel with newbie drummer, Joe Crabtree. But after three years and many gigs together, they are a formidable team. The best ever in my opinion. Muddy Manninen on guitar has been in the band for around six years. I believe he and I have developed a kind of empathy, which only comes with time, and the sharing of the same musical influences from way back.*



NCV: Where does the inspiration come from when writing material or working on guitar riffs? Is it anything like picturing an image in your mind and them composing music to go along with that image?

AP: *Sometimes it can be abstract like that. Or it can be rhythms all around you. Walking often produces ideas for me. I do like that tempo. Sometimes a lyrical idea can be the impetus for a song. Jamming together with the guys produces guitar riffs, for sure.*

NCV: Have aspiring guitar players told you that your work has been an inspiration to them to play guitar and be in a band?

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AP: *Actually yes, many, many times and that is one of the most rewarding and humbling things. It's a direct affirmation that you must be doing something right. It's that thing of being able to inspire passion for music in others and a desire to pick up an instrument and learn to play.*

NCV: After forty years with Wishbone Ash, what do you think it is that keeps fans interested?

AP: *The passion and the joy in the music and in playing live. That and never relying totally on the past but always moving forward and producing. Keeping the music stimulating, altering live arrangements making new CDs and DVDs.*

NCV: What can people expect from a Wishbone Ash show if they have never been to one?

AP: *A pretty joyous evening of quite varied rock music. The guitars are obviously the main thing but the vocal arrangements are very melodic, too. We'll play a mix of our classic material and the newer stuff, as mentioned. With any luck, there will be some soloing from everybody in one way or another. I always feel the two hours when we are on stage goes by too quickly.*

NCV: What else would you like to share or mention?

AP: *One interesting thing we have produced recently is a rockumentary, a fly on the wall glimpse of the creative process that goes on in writing our new CD. We took over an old manor house in Normandy, France and recorded our writing and rehearsal sessions. It's called "This is Wishbone Ash". We had a French video crew and a dedicated German sound engineer. The result is really something I am proud of. The French have a great tradition of documentary films and this DVD we have produced shows us, warts and all. The sound is first rate and there are even some clips of concert footage included plus six downloadable audio tracks.*



Another thing we have started is a series of live recordings called Roadworks. These are CDs actually recorded and released while on the road in record time. The first has just come out and is "Live at the Grand". We recently recorded a follow up at Hamburg, Germany's famed Fabrik venue. That will be released shortly.

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NCV: What other projects are you working on?

AP: *I'm going over to Ireland at the end of this tour of mainland Britain and I'll be joining with an old friend of mine, guitarist and fiddle player, Mr. Pat McManus. We'll play a few shows together. He is responsible for one of our new songs, Can't Go it Alone.*

I sometimes run a small music camp for kids in my home state of Connecticut and that has been interesting.

For more information on Wishbone Ash, please visit: www.wishboneash.com

For more information on the show at The Winchester, please visit: www.thewinchester.net