

AN INTERVIEW WITH

ARTHUR SMITH

EDINBURGH FESTIVAL LEGEND AND COMEDY ICON, ARTHUR SMITH IS ONE OF THE UK'S MOST INFLUENTIAL, SURPRISING AND DARING MODERN COMICS. HE WAS THERE AT THE BIRTH OF ALTERNATIVE COMEDY AND IS STILL GOING STRONG. HIS COBBLED UP SHAMBLES SHOW AT EDINBURGH THIS YEAR WAS FANTASTIC, SHOWING THE GREAT MAN'S RELAXED STYLE STILL PULLS IN THE PUNTERS. I GOT THE CHANCE TO CHAT WITH ARTHUR ABOUT HIS CAREER AND THE DELIGHTS OF THE FESTIVAL.

Are you enjoying the festival Arthur?

Yeah. Well I nearly always do enjoy it one way or another because it's like not real, it's like another world in some ways, the festival, that you enter into. You don't pay too much attention to what's happening in the outside world, it's all about this universe where everyone's on unicycles and wearing tights.

I mean you're there all month too, so there's no outside life all month.

Yeah but to be honest I don't do a month anymore, it's a bit much for me these days. I'm doing 15 shows, or something... 14, oh I don't know but..... I used to do a full month in years gone by.

What's the maddest thing that ever happened at one of your Edinburgh shows?

Quite a few things. I got arrested at the end of a gig. One of my late night tours. Oh god, a man poured a pint of urine over me once.

Jesus Christ.

Yeah it was a tribute; he was pretty out of it.

That was a tribute?

Yeah he told me after that was to say how much he was enjoying it, so I don't know what he'd have fucking done if he disliked it.

(Laugh) Yeah, done a shit on your head or something.

Yeah.

A strange critique that isn't it?

Yeah, oh blimey, in years gone by I used to have sex all the time. I wanted to be Russell Brand. That's the closest I could come to in Edinburgh.

This was my first visit to the festival, for a weekend. I saw your show at the Pleasance. I thought it was brilliant.

Once you've got it in you, you can't escape it.

Yeah it's like escaping your normal life isn't it?

Yeah it's true, it's true. If you're doing a show that becomes this big thing, that one thing in the day and around that everything revolves. The other day, within ten minutes, I'd met John Cooper Clarke, Ian Rankin and Abi Titmuss.

That's a weird mix.

Yeah, only at the Edinburgh festival would you come across a trio like that.



Who did you enjoy meeting the most out of those three?

(Laughs) Well, they all had different reasons. I mean, for amusement... well I don't wanna diss Abi Titmuss. The best to meet was John Cooper Clarke. I've met John a lot over the years.

Bit of a legend really isn't he?

Oh yeah, he is a legend. He's amazing, a very influential man as well. No one has ever done what he's done.

He's a complete original isn't he?

Oh yeah, he's a one off, old Johnny. I love Ian Rankin too; he's like Mr Edinburgh these days.

You get a good mix of everything at Edinburgh don't you?

Yeah absolutely.

What's Abi Titmuss doing there?

She's in a play, Up n' Under or something.

Is it still sunny up there then?

No it's fucking awful. It was raining yesterday. It was raining all night, it was dull. That's what you often get in Edinburgh. It starts all sunny and there's always some hand of weather to remind you autumn's coming up. I mean it's a bit like October today.

So last weekend I was there, you said it was the first time you'd been sun burned at the festival.

Yeah it's true. It was sunny at the weekend wasn't it?

You're pale again then now?

Yeah I got that Scottish look now.

So is the Cobbled up Shambles differing at every show?

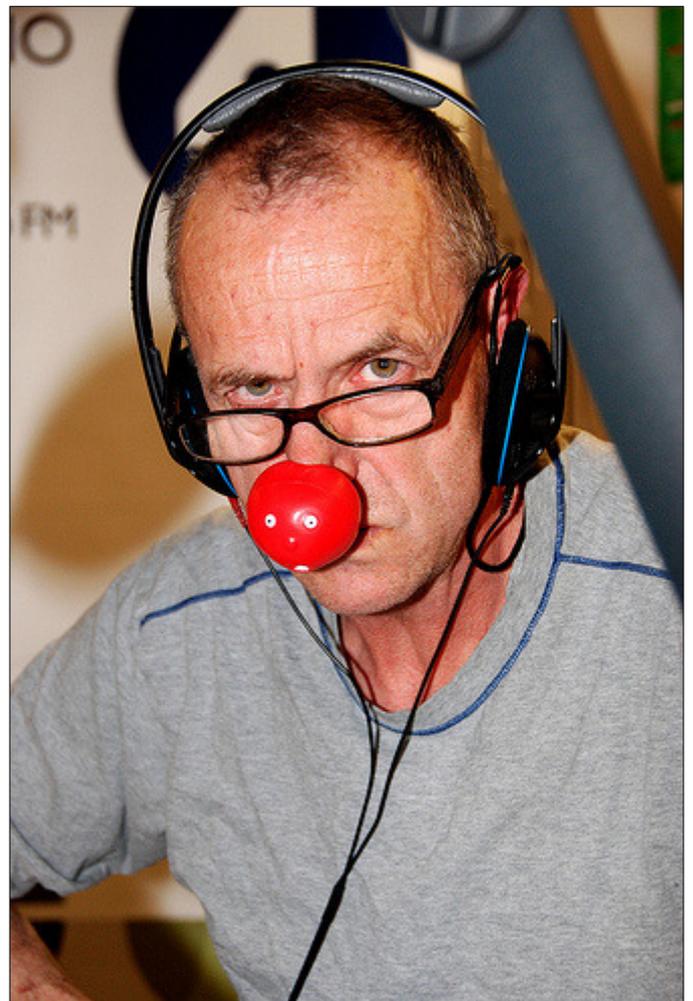
Yeah, it's quite different. Probably about half of it is the same but I experiment with things. The girls singing is the same and the naked woman.

Who is the nude, did you say she was a critic?

Yeah she's a reviewer.

How did you convince her to do that?

Well there was an art thing I did up here, an art exhibition. I got in touch with a woman who was a live model and a comedy critic.



She seems to enjoy it. She isn't a performer as such, but she does seem to draw some attention. I don't know what she does behind me, cos' I never look at her.

You don't wanna get a stiffy on stage?

(Laughs) Well I didn't want it to be a sexual thing, a nude woman going across. But I'm sure as a heterosexual man I'm sure you in the audience, well I dunno if you are heterosexual Chris, but I think you probably are....

Yeah I am.

It just sort of happens to be, she has no clothes on. It's not a big sexy thing.

I also loved when you sang Arthur Smith and His Amazing Dancing Bear. I love that song and I couldn't believe when that bear came out.

I've had that bear for years in my dressing up box, garage thing, and I actually went to get it out again.

You got a big dressing up box?

Well, we've all got dressing up stuff. There's a few old props. They're not actually in my house, it's a storage place where I keep all my silly costumes and I drag it all out. I've got this rubber baby, but I haven't been able to work out how to put it in.

You could do a Frank Zappa type thing. He used to do a Vietnam protest thing with a doll and say look what our boys are doing in Vietnam.

Oh yeah.

Maybe that wouldn't work.

Yeah, I think protesting about the Vietnam War's a little bit old hat.

Just a bit. You could update it to a new war.

Yeah. 'Tell me lies about Vietnam.' You remember that poem?

Yeah. Who else have you watched and enjoyed then?

Last night I saw a woman called Storm Large or something, doing a show called Crazy I think and she is absolutely amazing. One of the best things I've seen in Edinburgh for years.

My girlfriend had one question. Do you want your 10p back?

(Laughs) No I want her to squander it on drink, drugs and loose women.

I was gonna buy a bow tie with it. Do you mind if I buy a bow tie?

(Laughs) You can do what you like.

Are you ever gonna bring out a Leonard Cohen cover CD?

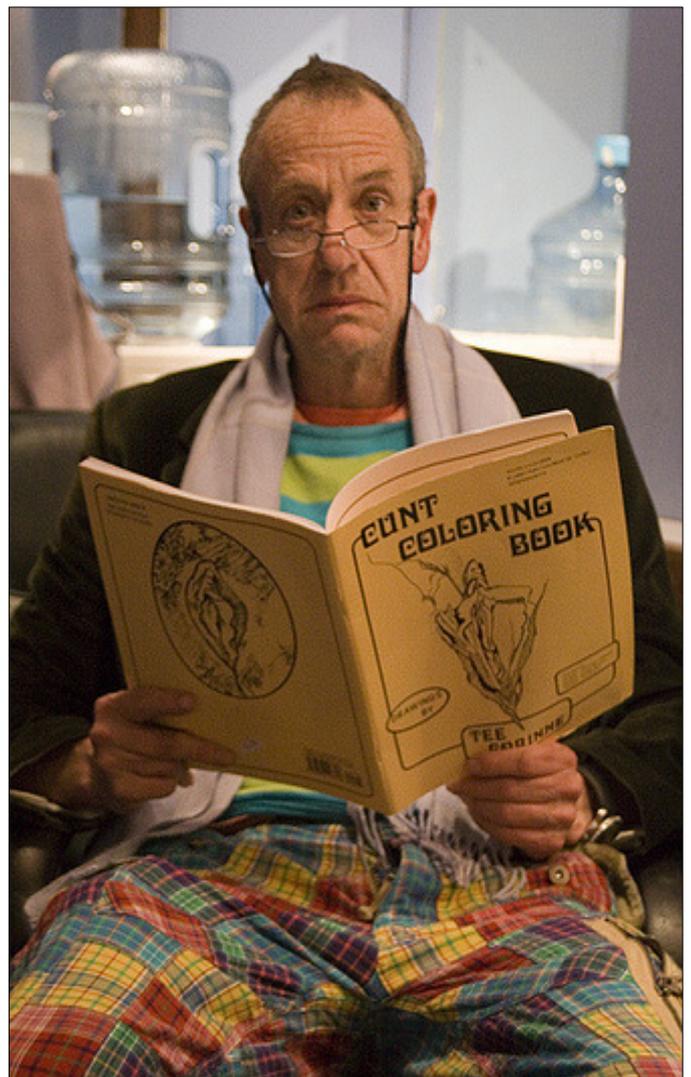
Yeah I think I will actually because there's a few I know now; the ones I did on the show for Radio 4, that's out there somewhere. I'd quite like to in a way. I like the idea of being the world's only Leonard Cohen tribute band.

Well I have a CD of one of the shows and I think the versions are brilliant.

Well he doesn't have much of a voice and neither do I so it's perfect. I'd better be shooting off anyway; the person I'm meeting has arrived at the bar.

Visit Arthur's website to see what he's up to:

www.arthursmith.co.uk/



A LITTLE LESSON IN FIDELITY

CHRISSIE HYNDE

AND JP JONES

By Keith B Covington



How does one begin something like this? A review of this magnitude ought to be taught as a college seminar. That's not some overzealous view of my writing skills but, rather an understatement of what happens when two musical geniuses get lemons and make lemonade.

Fidelity!(Available August 24th) is the newest project from Chrissie Hynde, this time she shares the stage with Welsh born singer/song writer JP Jones, along with a band, filled with talented Musicians, the Fairground Boys. The result is: Jp,Chrissie and the Fairground Boys.

Make no assumptions about this band and about this album. You may think you know Chrissie Hynde and some of you may think you know JP Jones but, this album will send you for a loop from it's subject matter to its execution.

Monday night I had the chance to see Jp, Chrissie and the Fairground Boy(s) at the Rockwood music Hall in NYC. To say the show was intimate would be a drastic understatement. Sitting less than 5 feet from Chrissie Hynde, JP Jones and their guitarist Patrick Murdoch, I found myself a part of the action going on onstage.

In a fine mood the three came out ready to play the ENTIRE album of Fidelity (previous shows had only showcased a maximum of 7 songs) JP Jones explained that this would be the first time they played some of these songs live at all and asked for our pardon in advance. He wouldn't need it.

Starting with their single "If You Let me" (Released August 10th) the band began to rock the acoustic set. Its in this song that the listener realizes that this isn't just an album. This isn't someone putting out music simply because they want to make money or because they like to. This is a story of why growing up is a hard thing to do sometimes.

The lyrics say: "I'm going to on this world/I'm going to make you love me/if you let me/if you let me/if you let me" sung in tandem it shows the like mind of the two songwriters. Every song is just as much felt by JP as it is Chrissie. There aren't any petty disagreements or empathy for the other. On Fidelity! Jp and Chrissie are one and the same.

The two of them chatted with the audience adding a great deal of humor to the rather humorless chunk of music.

The set of live songs were all gorgeous and painfully honest. The whole of Fidelity! being a story in which two people are forced to understand that they cannot be together because of the age difference between them. The woman is painted as "Past her prime" (a line which sparked some surprised audience reaction and "she wrote it!" as a response from JP Jones) and the man described as a "perfect lover but, he's only half my age".

The entire album is of this sort of thing, the realization that it isn't going to work between this two characters (are they Hynde and Jones?...probably) but, what sets this apart from a normal 'I wish I could have you but, I can't' story is that the two decide to take their love in a different direction.

The word "Son" and "Lover" comes up so much, it's PAINFULLY clear that they came to a

choice when they said "Hey we can't be lovers, let me take you under my wing son" In words like my feeble minded vernacular it sounds somewhat perverse but, when you hear this album, start to finish and hear Hynde's cooing versus JP ranting, you'll know.

While JP Jones seems still somewhat embarrassed to admit that this is of any truth to his life Hynde seemed casually open about the failed relationship. Whilst introducing a song named "Never Drink Again" (A quote Hynde has used before) Hynde explained the original name of the song was going to be: "Never drink again, until the pub opens up" a sentiment apparently shared by the other two and much of the audience.

It was then that Hynde does what she does. There aren't any words to describe it, it's either some sort of fearless truth and insight of herself or some kind of over-the-top form of bullshit but, Hynde says that she's stopped drinking because when she does she becomes a "Cunt". At the sheer utterance of the 'C' word the entire audience gasped and moaned in disapproval but, Hynde got defensive of the choice of words. "No it's true, he knows it. When I drink I go to the dark side"

It's that kind of honesty (?) that fills the album, listeners will be treated to an unabashed version of their view on this tragic situation and the audience can decide if their even doing the write thing. Sure the two of them can write a song but, what will this love affair yield at the very end? Is Fidelity! the ultimate love story or a musical tribute to the mistakes we make when we fall in love and can't climb our way out?

Whatever it is, Rockwood Musical hall was able to get a glimpse of it. Filled with humor, fun and the passionately played out lyrics, it was hard not to get totally sucked into Fidelity!'s world. A wave of uneasy apprehension filled the room as the words: "I wish I could have met you in a former life, or seen you in a future time" Heartbreak plainly laid onto our laps with no real solution in sight.

Fidelity! is everything and nothing at the same time. Its what you WANT from an artist and

yet it has no solution to its story, we're told from the first lyric how this game is going to be played before our eyes and in the very end we still see they had not lied.

The concept of their love not being able to grow the way they want is complicated but, they treat it as a simple inconvenience. The human mind will baffle at it and enjoyed being toyed with.

Fidelity! is a complicated, perplexing view of simplicity and common sense.

As harsh as an acid and soothing as a base.

Tuesday August 10th New York City, SoHo.

After the events at the Rockwood musical hall the night before, I couldn't pass up the chance to see the band again at the Apple store in SoHo. A free event that was set up for the store.

There's not much to say here, they did 5 planned songs and revealed that management or Apple or some other power that be wouldn't be allowing them to do anymore. But after some coaxing from the audience they unveiled an even NEWER song in a catalogue of new songs. Hynde explained the song is going to be released as a Christmas EP and the band had to take some time to remember how to play it but, when it was all over, the song was a beautiful Christmas ballad.

Restricted by time and the store the SoHo appearance wasn't the same glimpse into life ala Jones/Hynde but, a showcase of good songs.

I shouldn't have to type this but, if you aren't convinced that you should rush out and find the nearest performance by Jp/Chrissie and the Fairground Boys at this point of the review then simply don't go. You're not alive probably.

Fidelity! is NOT a Pretenders album and one shouldn't convince themselves that the band will play Pretenders songs or have any Pretenders sentiments whatever. This is all new, and as real as it gets. Hynde hasn't ever really let her audience down and Fidelity! is among the best music she's ever put out. Walk don't run.

HOUND DAWG MAGAZINE

THANKS FOR READING!

