

LEG has been keeping a quiet eye on Woodstar, wondering if the hype being heaped on them by respected artists, producers, engineers and other industry types would transfer to public adoration and the resultant sales which may lead to their own Point show sooner than we may think.

A quiet corner in Java's makes a surprisingly comfortable place to talk to a couple of boys who are surprisingly comfortable with their achievements, ambitions, hopes and dreams. This was the first time LEG had really sat down and got the history and future plan for Woodstar. Their passion for what they do shines through, their commitment to the independent path they've taken, they display a drive which comes with experience and knowing, but still retain that excitement when something goes right.

We start, as we should, with the brief history. The famous Hot Press award is broached but quickly skipped over by a band who have a lot more to talk about from the time between that award and this cup of coffee. Woodstar released their first ep, 'Time To Bleed', under a one EP deal with Parlaphone spin-off, Regal Records, "a label with indie status but the money of Parlaphone to back it up", says Finn. The deal came about when 11 copies of a demo were sent to various labels across the UK. "We really only knew what we had when a lot of those labels came back to us having received the demo," Finn explains. "Next thing we knew, reps from these labels were at one of our gigs in McGregors. Matt Edwards who owns Hero Music, which is the publishing wing of Excel, and handle people like The Prodigy, offered us a publishing deal straight away, but we wanted to hold out for a deal under which we'd get the support to release the record in the UK. He brought Regal's Dan Keeling, who discovered Coldplay, to the McGregors gig, and the day after, he came to watch us rehearse in our studio in Mungret. He liked it, offered us the deal and that was that."

So the record was released. One thing that struck us was their commitment to wait for the deal that suited them. The benefit of experience obviously helped them where many younger bands falter. "It's a lot easier to do things independently in Ireland, but in the UK, you need a financial backer. We were offered a lot of essentially bad deals, labels who weren't willing to commit to tour support, which is essential. Regal are willing to nurture new acts, and work with them to build them." While the initial deal with them was just for the one EP, they are interested in carrying on their support, and we'd love to continue working with them. We also had a lot of good people advising us, from people within the industry to people like Tuesday Blue. They were a prime example. When they signed to EMI, they signed a three album deal, but it was dependent on sales of their first record. Before that record was released, the management at the label changed, weren't interested in pushing what they were doing, and as a result, the first record didn't sell as much as it should have and they were dropped. We listen and learn from people and experiences like that."

The influence of established industry people on the band's progress has been significant. Both Ronan & Finn insist that basing everything in their home town has benefited rather than hindered them. "It's easy nowadays with the internet and e-mail to be in the loop. And in a lot of ways it's easier to get noticed when you're not among hundreds of other bands coming out of Dublin. Obviously, the music is everything, but people seemed to take notice of the fact that a band outside the capital were doing it on their own when we sent out our original demos. They took note of the fact that our studio, our management, our record company was all being done by ourselves in our own back yard. Through that, as we've said, the deal with Regal came about, and that EP was produced by Ben Hillier, who produced Elbow's Mercury Music Prize nominated record, and has just finished working on Blur's new album. Through that process, Stephen Street expressed an interest in working with us, and he's produced this EP. Now, Richard Rainey, who's engineered U2 wants to work with us, Coldplay's guitarist and Róisín Murphy from Moloko like what we've done, it's just a knock on effect, people of influence talking to each other. It's a real domino effect. People who work in the industry seem to like what we're doing and we're hoping that will transfer to the people at the gigs.

It already seems to be going that way. Support dates with Gemma Hayes in England and Dublin brought a lot of interest, resulting in successful shows of their own in Dublin. It also transferred to sales of the first EP, which moved a few thousand copies in both Ireland and the UK, which the band were very happy with. Another goal on their calendar is to get into the colleges and build their crowd further. "The colleges are hugely important. College radio in the States can make or break you. A station in Chicago got hold of a copy of 'These Scars' on the last EP, and have been in contact looking for more stuff. We're trying to get to do some shows in the UK colleges, because they can really open you up to a huge audience, and we'd like to do the same in Ireland."

2003 began with the recording and mixing of their debut album, 'Life Sparks', in Grouse Lodge Studios with production duties performed again by the legendary Stephen Street along with Grammy award-winning Richard Rainey. Following completion of the album in February the band took the Irish Heineken Rollercoaster 2003 tour by the scruff of the neck and gave it a damn good shake, impressing audiences right around the country before heading over to the U.S. in March for live shows in New York's Mercury Lounge and The Hard Rock Cafe in Austin, Texas (as part of the South By South West conference).

Following the release of the album in Ireland on April 04, the band toured extensively before embarking on a support tour with Maria McKee which took them all over the UK. woodstar released 'the Last SadVverse Of A Dumb Punk Song' ep in the UK on June 16 to critical acclaim. They received national air-play, most notably on BBC Radio 1 and 6Music. Since then, they've toured extensively in Ireland and played many festivals, the highlight of which was playing the main stage at Witness. They also undertook some radio and TV work in Ireland with the summer highlight being their appearance on Coulter & Co on RTE1.

The band released their debut album in the UK on the October 06 to some great reviews and this was followed by the release of their next single 'Can't Let Go of Anything'. The band are undertaking an Irish tour in December and are currently working on their 2nd album due for release next year. Catch them in the Warehouse on Stephen's Night.

they're turning out to be a bit of a shining light on not only the limerick music scene, but indeed the irish music scene. working away quietly, woodstar are slowly taking over the music world from the quiet surrounds of mungret. and they're doing it all on their own. now it's time for all that quiet work to bear fruit with a home show before it all blows up. ronan & finn talk about past present and future.

david o'donovan
does the talkin'.....

