

+ WOODSTAR

local band profile



Nearly a year ago this week, in December of 2000, Woodstar took to the stage in Dolan's Warehouse for the first time, supporting American band The Williard Grant Conspiracy.

Fast forward to April and a nervous Woodstar are receiving a "pep talk" from front man Fin before going out to play the final of the Hot Press band of the year competition at HQ in Dublin. After winning that, September saw them recording an EP for Parlophone at Parr St. studios in Liverpool. Up to the present day and Woodstar are sitting in their rehearsal room, facing into a clutch of gigs ahead of the EP's release in early spring.

Woodstar are Fin Chambers (vocals, guitars), Alan Sheehan (keyboards, vocals), Doug Murray (Drums) Kieran Calvert (Guitars) and Ronan Considine (Bass). They had all played in various bands around Limerick, most notably Ludlow, before coming together in February 2000 in a small studio behind Doug's house. It was here that they began to write and record, taking their time over the structure and composition of their songs. By their own admission they are all extremely picky about the music: every band member has input into the arrangement of the songs. This sort of painstaking approach has clearly paid off: every Woodstar song is beautifully crafted, almost seamlessly arranged, nothing is ever out of place or forced sounding. Or, as Fin says:

"The song is paramount: if you don't give the song 120%, it's never going to rise above the instruments."

Woodstar are wary of bands that overplay to hide weak songs: their approach is to write melody and then build on it, each member contributing to the song and then going over it again and again until it is ready. They recorded and practised for nearly a year before they ever played live and it shows. Woodstar's sound is constantly evolving, so much so that they have just added a new member, Billy Mulqueen, who plays samples and extra keyboards, allowing them to bring an extra level to their live performance.

After the Williard Grant gig, Woodstar continued to play locally, selling their demo and trying to attract some industry attention. Their involvement in the Hot Press Band of the Year competition happened almost by accident: one of their friends submitted their demo and they duly progressed through the regional heat to the Final at HQ in Dublin. The band says that they approached the final with no real expectation of actually winning; they were just pleased to get the exposure. Their subsequent victory over a clutch of Dublin bands was received

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with delight by the handful of supporters who travelled up from Limerick with them. Chalk one to the culchies, then! While all of this was going on, Woodstar's approaches to the music industry were beginning to pay off: they secured a publishing deal with Hero Music in London which led, in turn, to an EP contract with Parlophone (Beatles,

Radiohead). In September of this year, they duly decamped to Parr St. Studios in Liverpool to record with Blur producer Ben Hillier.

Woodstar speak glowingly of their time with Ben; he had asked to work on the record after hearing their demo and took the time to listen to all the band members input on how the recording should sound, vital considering the way that Woodstar approach their music. The results of this meeting of minds are obvious to anyone who has heard them: the recording captures the Woodstar sound perfectly.

They recorded "Sorry Skin", acoustic number "World War In A Bed" and the lead track "Time To Bleed" in Liverpool. Two other songs, "These Scars" and "She Catches", which were recorded in Doug's studio, will also appear on the final version.

The EP is set for release in February of 2002 and the record company have promised to throw their full weight behind its promotion. Woodstar are unfazed by all of this excitement and are likewise sanguine about the grim history of Irish bands and major labels. Aside from Parlophone they have been in contact with BMG, east/West, Independiente and Polydor, to name but a few. They remain in control of their destiny and are keeping their options open with a view to getting an album deal soon.

Woodstar, then, remain impossible to pigeonhole: they are often called alt.country (a tag they hate) but they have transcended that genre, are true mavericks, using simple songs as a base to build sweeping, soaring epics that are at once highly personal yet cannot help but touch the heart of everyone who hears them. They are truly unique and the way things are going, the sky's the limit. If you haven't experienced Woodstar yet get along to Dolan's on the 20th of December and get ready to believe. Woodstars??? You bet!

MIKE DEVINE