

THE RETURN OF 'THE WEDDING PRESENT'

Live at Birmingham Academy
by Edward Komocki

From our experiences that evening in April 2001, we should have guessed that this was not to be the usual Cinerama performance.

Anger and aggression plagued us from the moment we left home until we arrived at the Birmingham Academy! We had to drive through THE most violent of rainstorms on the A38, saw two cars hit support columns in the multi-storey car park and then witnessed a fist-fight between two drunken women after they spilled out of a city centre pub onto the pavement in front of us! (Incidentally, the eventual victor took one of her vanquished opponent's shoes as a trophy and was last seen staggering down a side-street waving it aloft in triumph!) Maybe this sort of thing always happens between rival managers at the monthly Freeman Hardy and Willis night-out, but we were shocked!

However, the true moment of realisation that this was to be a very different sort of Cinerama show came after the support group Tahiti 80 had left the stage. At this point in the proceedings we usually all gaze wistfully at Sally as she loads up banks of keyboards on their stands, places numerous acoustic guitars in strategic positions and tunes up a very nice-looking flute in preparation for the wide-ranging cornucopia of musical textures that is Cinerama! But this time she didn't. She only brought on a range of electric guitars and one very small keyboard best described as 'Slightly Bigger Brother of Stylophone'.

Then, in rather sombre attire, she, David and the rest of the band took to the gloom of the stage and strapped on their instruments. It was then I was hit by one overwhelming impression - Seamonsters!

The regular opener '146 Degrees' was played with customary passion and zeal, but then came 'Superman'! Now this is one of David Gedge's most swoon-some and melancholic tunes, all swirling strings and restrained brass flourishes.



But this version positively exploded at us! Guitars thundered at full volume, drums crashed like meteors and David yelled and yelled! En masse, the audience took a step back as jaws dropped, eyeballs bulged and eardrums perforated!

My premonitions had been correct! This wasn't Cinerama! This was May 1991. This was 'Seamonsters'! THIS was The Wedding Present !!!

And in this manner did the whole show progress! All our Cinerama favourites became wild and raging avalanches of guitar noise!

'Après Ski', 'Heels' and even 'Dance Girl Dance' were suffused with an outrageous volume and urgency! The play-out on 'Honey Rider' was prolonged to an extent and fury not heard since the days of 'What Have I Said Now' and even the new songs - 'Quick Before it Melts' and 'Careless' - sounded angry and forceful.

The inclusion of four Wedding Present songs fuelled the already volcanic atmosphere - 'Blue Eyes', 'Suck', 'Crawl' and 'Bewitched' were played as though Cinerama had never been conceived! Thrashy, no nonsense, head-down guitar epics to shake us.

By the time David announced the final song we were all exhausted! But that didn't stop us begging for more.

In fact this was one of the funniest pleading sessions for an encore in which I've ever participated at either a Cinerama or Wedding Present gig:

David Gedge: Well this is our last song for tonight and of course you know we don't do encores.

Audience: Oh, please David!

David Gedge: Why does everyone always want an encore? There's no point!

Audience: There is a point! We want more! We want more!

David Gedge: Look, if I'd baked a cake and you'd all eaten it, I'd hardly be likely to suddenly bring out some more and say "Here's a bit more I made. Do you want this too?"

Audience: We'd eat the cake, David. We'd eat it!

David Gedge: Okay then... if I'd made a film and you'd all watched it, I wouldn't just bring out some more bits at the end and say: "Oh, here's some extra scenes we shot. Do you want to watch these?"

Audience: We'd watch them David!

David Gedge: (now more than a little exasperated and with Sally visibly giggling in the background) Well we're not going to! This is 'Wow'.

If we thought that 'Honey Rider' had been pushed to its limit, then 'Wow' went into uncharted territory! The vocal section was impassioned and desperate and the guitar finale grew like a surging tidal wave before crashing into a storm of feedback! Only Simon Cleave was left on-stage at this point and amid the howling noise, he did what a man had to do... he trashed his guitar! That was just how it had to be!!!

We left drained but exhilarated. There were no more acts of aggression on the way home but we did find the abandoned 'battle-shoe' on top of a bin outside MacDonaldis! We played Cinerama tapes on the way home and wondered whether we'd actually been to see the same band. Here in the car was music of delicacy and finesse, of sweeping orchestral grandeur and widescreen cinematic vision.

Back there, no less than thirty minutes ago, the same people had played the same music and yet dragged from it a previously-unheard degree of power and intensity. But then such surprises and contradictions are what make them truly great and keep us coming back for more!