

JUSTIN HAYWARD

As the vocalist and one of the primary songwriters in the legendary Moody Blues, Justin Hayward is one of rock's enduring success stories. Penning numerous hits, including the universally known 'Nights In White Satin', Justin was also well remembered for his performance on Jeff Wayne's 'War Of The Worlds' album, not to mention enjoying a prolific solo career. February sees the release of his latest solo record 'Spirits Of The Western Sky', before the Moody Blues return to the UK for a string of live dates. An early interview slot was arranged with Justin immediately apologizing for calling so early. James Gaden explained that he doesn't get out of bed for anyone who has sold less than 50 million records, so Mr Hayward just makes the grade...

I feel like you've been stalking me lately Justin, I can't get away from you - I've been listening to your album, I saw a programme on Sky Arts the other night where you were talking about some of the Moody Blues videos in the 80s and yesterday you were on Radio 2!

(Laughs) Yes, somebody phoned me up and said Ken Bruce played 'In Your Blue Eyes'. It was someone I don't know that well, so I asked him what he thought it sounded like and he replied 'Sounded like the Moody Blues.' (laughs) That's alright then!

It's been a long time since your last solo record 'The View From The Hill'. How long have you been working on this record?

I must have started writing for this not long after 'The View From The Hill', but it was interrupted because the Moody's did a Christmas album called 'December' and then another album called 'Strange Times'. Those, along with different projects, meant I was starting to collect songs. I found this little studio in Nice, it was a demo studio. I'm really not very good at recording my own voice at home. Several years before, I'd been doing the basic tracks at home and then taking my guitars and the tracks into a studio to do it professionally, turn it into a proper record. I could never get my voice though. So I found this little studio in Nice and the guy there had the most wonderful setup of old microphones... which suited my old voice! (laughs) He had some specific ones, a Neumann u87 from the early 60s that was just right. I started getting my voice down on these demos, this will have been about fifteen years ago. I didn't know what these songs were for yet, be it the Moodys, myself, some other project... it was only about three of four years ago between tours, my engineer and I listened to these things and it dawned on us both there was an album there. We had to do these songs seriously now and I had an Italian drummer and bass player who are friends on there, it started coming together. I called Anne Dudley who came in for a couple of songs. It started about fifteen years ago, but working seriously on it, the last three.

I see - I was going to ask if you have a metaphorical Moody Blues hat and a solo hat when you are writing, or whether you let the feel of the track you are writing dictate who it's best suited for...

I think all the songs I write have been for myself, then I will think of them in a Moody Blues context afterwards. I always think like the songwriter I was when I was seventeen, before I joined the Moody's. I'll then listen to it and see if it will work with the Moody's. There was a point where I was writing things which had a social commentary and I've never been particularly good at that. The other guys were "seeing the cosmos in its state, moving across a sky..." sort of thing. (laughs) I was more or less writing pop songs and trying to fit them in with that kind of thing. 'Question' was a social commentary thing, that was fine, along with a few others from that period. I wrote a few recently and I think that will have to be another album. I'm collecting a few songs that aren't in the romantic mode of this album.

You mentioned Anne Dudley - you had worked with her before, orchestrating some Moody Blues songs on the re-recordings on the 'Greatest Hits' album. You've often used orchestration with the Moodys, was it natural for you to do the same here, or did you sit back and think 'Actually, that could really use...' and call Anne?

Definitely the latter. I thought 'This could do with...'

If I stopped as I had it, with just my guitar phrases and the piano, with the drums, then Anne had a blank page to work on. I played her these two songs in her house, then I gave her the basic recordings. She was really into it - I think she found it a bit of a relief from what she was doing. She had just begun to provide the playing for *Les Misérable*. She's the person who sat on that set every day and played the piano for the cast of *Les Mis*. She had just started and I think working on my songs was a pleasant distraction for her. (laughs)

Who else do you have on the album with you - my promo doesn't list musicians, are there any other famous names?

There's a song on there called 'On The Road To Love'. I was in Acapulco about seven or eight years ago now.

Kenny Loggins was staying in the same hotel, he's an acquaintance of mine. I've known him for many years as an acquaintance and Kenny is such a bright person. He said "Hey Justin, why don't we do something? What are you doing this afternoon?" I had a gig that night so he said "Let's do it, we've got a couple of hours!" We sat in the hotel room, just for fun, and played on a couple of guitars. I was quite nervous because I don't often do that - I don't know whether to stand up while he sits, sit down while he paces... (laughs) But he made it just great. We came out of that room with something - we hugged and it was absolutely great. The intention was he would use it on his album, which he subsequently didn't make. I made the demo of the song we had come up with and sent it to him. He then did some more on his side and sent it back to me, so I emailed him and said I'd like to use it on my album. He said "Fantastic!" and gave me the go-ahead. He did the harmony backing vocals and that's his acoustic guitar on there. We made it over the internet - fantastic!

I often ask people who have had long careers like yourself, this question - have you embraced the digital age or do you miss how it used to be?

I like some analogue processes, but the recording itself, no, I'd never return to the days of tape. There was a warmth about tape that I always liked, but now it can be recreated digitally if you want that.

Absolutely - it must be so much easier to edit things, because literally you used to have to splice tape with a razor didn't you?

Yes, and do thousands of takes! There are three

bluegrass style songs on there which were done in Nashville. Those songs involved no technology at all - that really was a case of getting a group of boys together, an engineer and record the songs on four or five takes. You'd then just pick the one you liked best and that was it, finished. No double tracking, nothing, the only thing added afterward was a girl's voice to add harmony to mine.

Was the country flavour a style you'd wanted to explore before, or was that just an influence created by being in Nashville?

It was definitely the latter, because a few years ago I was invited by a songwriter's association to be part of a gig in Nashville. I went along with a couple of my guitars. Steve Winwood was there, he was living there at the time, he was playing mandolin. Michael McDonald was there, along with some other non-Nashville people and a group of country people I'd never met. It dawned on me that Nashville was embracing me as a songwriter. You get so used to this business looking at youth as a prized commodity. That's the truth. It doesn't happen in Nashville though! They work the other way, they look up to the older musicians and give them time and respect. I thought "This is the place for me!" and started doing showcases with a couple of other country people. I got more into the bluegrass thing where there are strict rules - you can't have an electric bass, you can't have any drums, no electric guitars... it has to be done like you were just in a room acoustically with an upright bass, an acoustic guitar, dobro or mandolin, violin and that's it. That suited me down to the ground, so I went back and did it with some guys, it was just great.

I think you can tell, because on my list of the songs I liked the best, 'It's Cold Outside Of Your Heart' was one I listed and that's firmly entrenched in that genre. I thought you did a great job with that.

Yes, that's down to those guys, the way they play. They listen to my voice and play around it.

At the end of the record, there are two versions of the Moody's classic 'I Know You're Out There Somewhere', which have been re-done as club mixes. They are really well done, but it's something of a departure for you and considerably different to the rest of the album, so what is the story behind those?

I had an email from some Swedish boys who said they were putting together a club mix and they wanted to use parts from the record, but were having trouble sampling it from the actual song. They asked if I would consider doing just the parts they wanted for them to mix in. I asked for them to send me the track to have a listen and they did. I just thought it was great, it was a great adaptational way to use it. They were quite specific about what they needed, which was just my voice and a bit of DX7 keyboard which I played on the original. I did it, it only took my engineer Alberto and I an afternoon to record the bits they wanted. I sent it back and a week later they sent it back to me and I thought it was great! I had no idea what to do with it, it was just going to be them playing it in clubs.

Then a guy who does a lot of stuff in Ibiza, called Raul Rincon, picked up on their version and did a new version of his own! How they dissect all this stuff I don't know! (laughs) So I ended up with these two versions, both of which were going to be unreleased, just played in clubs. I thought I would put them at the end of my record, it was such a waste to let them go. Those guys deserve all the credit, my contribution was quite small, but when Alberto and I mastered it, you couldn't sit down while doing it! My wife does this Zumba thing and three days a week they're all Zumba-ing to it! (laughs)

You're a very prolific song writer - do you have a preferred way of composing? Do you sit with a guitar and play around, wait for inspiration, how does it work?

Creativity is basically 3% inspiration and 97% hard work. I'm sure it's the same for you when writing a piece, if you really dedicate yourself to writing a piece, something good will come out. It's very unusual that you or I would sit down determined to work and nothing would happen. At least you have something to build on when you come back to it. I work like that - I just have

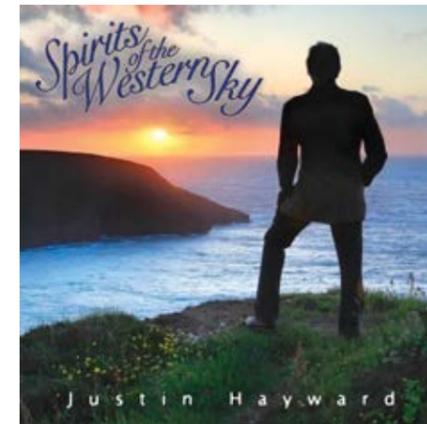
to decide to work on a certain day to come out with something to build on. Even if I'm building on it laying in bed at night, jotting things down on a pad, I can then take that and go back and build a little bit more. The Moody Blues always relied on me for that - whenever we booked studio time in the old days, they always saw that I'd have something to start them off. We'd always start with my songs and the others would go "Oh, I could do some of that!" and they'd get it together. (laughs)

As you have written so many songs over the years, do you question yourself about whether you have already covered a subject before or think it's similar to something you've previously recorded, or is it all instinct when you write?

I often think about if I've done it before, yes. I discard that in the end though, we all have a certain mode, we all have a certain chord progression or something we favour.

Do you spend much time listening back to your material or do you always seek to move forward?

I do listen back, because I was lucky enough that Universal came to me when they wanted to re-master things. When the Moody's stuff was rushed into digital in the 80s, the transfer was done very badly. I only realised that a few years ago when Universal asked me to look at it again. I went back to the original vinyl stereo masters and they were far better than what had appeared on digital. It had been copied and copied and copied and nobody questioned the original source the copies were from. I was forced really to listen to the whole Moody Blues catalogue. I have done regularly. With 'Days Of Future Passed', I had to do that in 5.1 Surround Sound.



Fortunately, Tony Clarke and Derek Varnals, the original producer and engineer, had done a quad version. I'm not sure that even came out, but there was my 5.1 - all I had to do was add ambience from one more speaker. My first impression, listening back, was "How the hell did we do that?" (laughs) I know I was very stoned for all of it, so that accounts for some of it, but some of the stuff on those first albums is really magical and inspiring.

When you write, do you know when you've written a special song, like 'I Know You're Out There Somewhere' or 'Nights In White Satin' for instance, or are you too attached to each song to be objective?

When we did 'I Know You're Out There Somewhere' and 'Wildest Dreams', I thought 'Wildest Dreams' was a throwaway, a bit light hearted, but it was the track that people beamed in on. When that happened, I understood what they were hearing. As soon as we played it to an audience, I could see what it meant, that shared experience of finding your first love and all that. I knew with 'I Know You're Out There Somewhere', I knew we had a groove with it and to ride it out and enjoy it.

'Nights In White Satin' completely took me by surprise. There was some resistance to putting it out, as well as others being hugely enthusiastic about putting it out. It's still a mystery to me to this day what it is about that song - there's virtually nothing on the record, it's all echo, no double tracking... it's a mystery. We did a song called 'Watching And Waiting' which we were all convinced would be our biggest song. People were always saying "Why can't you write another 'Nights in White Satin', eh?" I thought I had done with 'Watching

And Waiting' but millions didn't agree with me! (laughs) Nothing happened to it at all, it was such a lovely song but it never went anywhere.

You mentioned audience reaction there - is that the biggest thrill you get from being a songwriter, seeing what a song means to people first hand when you perform it?

When you create it, you imagine what the audience reaction and their faces will be like. You can't second guess it though, in reality people react to different parts of different songs. Doing it live and seeing the reaction live is the only test you can use.

Way back, the Moody's formed a label called Threshold in the 60s, to control artwork and things like that because your record label didn't like paying for lavish album sleeves. Threshold launched one of my favourite artists, Glenn Hughes, because Trapeze were signed by your label, with John Lodge producing their debut album. Was it always a plan to release other artists on the label or were you guys simply taken with certain artists and wanted to give them a leg up?

Really, we were following The Beatles into things like that. The first thing we wanted, as you rightly said, was control over our own releases and control over our sleeves. That was most important to us. Then it was a question of us having this label... Sir Edward Lewis at Decca gave us everything we wanted, he was very much a record executive with the attitude of "I don't know what you're doing, but it's wonderful, people love it, get out and do it." He gave us a recording studio at Broadhurst Gardens in West Hampstead, and so, we decided to look for other artists, have some auditions... anything but go on the road! (laughs) Now we're the other way around, the three of us are dying to get out all the time. But I suppose then it was "I know a bloke who knows this band who are really good..." We brought people into the fold and it worked wonderfully for a few recordings.

Later we realised we were meeting their managers, publishers and guys looking at us across the desk thinking "These guys have got some money..." We were on the wrong side of the fence, we had always been on the artist's side! I'd find myself in a studio making artist's records for them, saying "Oh, give it to me!" (laughs) That's awful! We decided en masse that it wasn't for us.

Glenn though, he's done very well for himself over the years. He's a pal, I still hear from him, he still phones me up in that mad, frantic kind of voice! Very enthusiastic - you'll know, having met him, he was always a guy who was going places.

To finish off, you said about dying to get back on the road, The Moody Blues will be touring throughout the UK in June - what can fans expect from that?

The three of us are rediscovering the whole body of our work, particularly the older stuff. We were on a bus a few years ago and I said to Graeme (Edge) "Wouldn't it be great to do the song 'You And Me', it's got such a great guitar riff!" I wrote the music, Graeme did the lyrics. He said "Just remind me of that..." so I played it to him from my computer. He said "Oh, that's fucking great, that..." He'd completely forgotten it, but he pointed out we'd only played the song for two days in a studio to record it, then we never played or listened to it again! So we decided to make an effort to rediscover and enjoy a lot of the material we'd made over the years. That's the philosophy - bring back old songs people really love or help them rediscover them. Play something we'd only known for a few hours and never played or listened to since. To do these songs will be a joy - that's what you can expect, something from everybody. I think we have something from all the Moody Blues albums in the set. We do two hours, the first half is some of the more obscure stuff, the second half is the stuff we can't get off stage without playing! (laughs)

Justin's album 'Spirit's Of The Western Sky' is released on the 25th February. The Moody Blues will play 14 UK dates starting on the 5th June. Tickets are priced at £47.50 in London and £39.50 regionally (subject to booking fee) and are available from www.livenation.co.uk or www.ticketmaster.co.uk