

# ONE MORE FOR THE ROAD

**After their triumphant performance at Download, the reformed Little Angels announced they were hitting the road - and asked their opening act from back in the 90s, Skin, to reform as well in order to support them once more. It's an offer difficult to turn down, but for guitarist Myke Gray, it means a very busy end to the year. He explains to James Gaden how he intends to juggle touring with Skin, playing his own headline show with his band Red White & Blues and fitting in Hard Rock Hell while he's at it...**

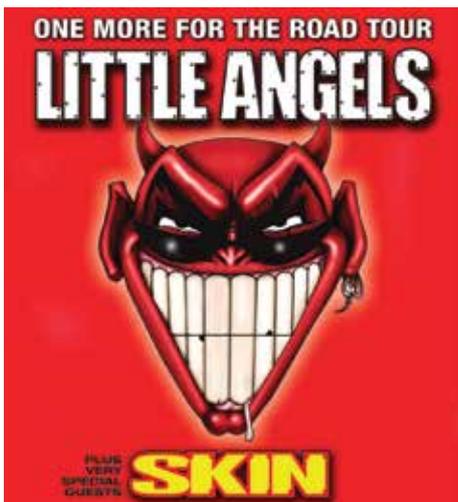
**You're playing Hard Rock Hell, on the Sunday - as you tour less than the old days, do you have to work harder to be ready for shows, or do you find that you get more amped up for them when they do happen?**

It's really hard. If you think of a Premiership footballer, he plays one game and then doesn't play again for four months. When he plays the next time, people expect him to be at the same level as the last time they saw him. He hasn't been playing week after week after week. It's very, very tough, the rehearsals and the build up becomes very stressful because you have to cram so much in to such a small amount of time. Playing live is so different to rehearsing too - in rehearsal, you make a mistake, you can just do it again. Live, you only get one chance and that state of mind, that only comes from doing it, you can't get that from rehearsals. I'd rather do ten consecutive gigs with no rehearsal than five days rehearsing for a couple of gigs. What you get from that one gig will blow away a week of rehearsing. And with what's coming up for me, I'm doing it with two completely different bands! (Laughs) I'm doing two shows with Red White & Blues, and the day after those, I start rehearsals for Skin. It'll take a huge amount of preparation to pull that off.

**We'll stay with Red White & Blues for the moment - you're playing a headline show at Yardbirds in Grimsby. You set that one up yourself - you were hoping to do some more headline gigs, but you've ended up with just this one?**

Yeah - we've actually only done one other headline show, when we played in Wales at the Steelhouse Festival. We planned on doing a full headline tour but there's a few different reasons why that didn't work out. Then we were asked if we wanted to play Hard Rock Hell. We were looking at a few options and Yardbirds came recommended to us from my friend Matt Goom from the Quireboys. He said it was just a great club, great people ran it and we should go there. I've never been to Grimsby before, I figured it would be a cool thing to do. To play somewhere with good PA, good lights and a crowd of people who appreciate good music, it's all good!

**It's rare to play a headline show when you have one album out. So I assume you will play the majority of it. What will fill out the rest of the set?**



We will play the whole album, and we extend certain songs out so the album basically becomes almost a full set, nearly an hour and fifteen minutes. Some songs live will include extra parts and additions. We're never lacking in things we can play. If we need to use some Jagged Edge stuff and throw in 'You Don't Love Me', then we will!

**After that we have the news that Skin will reform, to open for the reunited Little Angels, to recreate the tour you guys did in 1993. A real blast from the past! How did that come about?**

It came from nowhere... Red White & Blues played the first day at Download and then we did the acoustic set. As I was playing, Toby Jepson was in the audience watching us. I thought that was really sweet, we've obviously been friends for a very long time. I thought he was just there to show his support, as I'd seen the Little Angels play the day before. It had gone fantastically, so I went to talk to Toby once we had finished our set and he said that the Angels had decided to play some shows in December, and they really wanted Skin to open up for them. I loved the idea, but I had to run it past the other guys first. We played High Voltage and that was supposed to have been our last show, but Toby had the attitude of "Whatever it takes to make it happen" and gave his full support. On the way back from Download, I called Dicki Flizar first, he simply said "Yep, no problem". Then I called Andy Robbins and he said "Yeah, let's do it!" then I called Nev, and he said "I'd love to do it but we'd best find out if the other two would be up for it." I said "They've already agreed, mate." So Nev replied "Well, it looks like we're doing it then!" (laughs) So it was all sorted in the time it took to get home from Download!

**Little Angels have only just reunited, but Skin have done an album since returning. Will you use any of the 'Breaking the Silence' material in the set?**

I think we'll simply go for a "Greatest Hits" approach. We'll have to play 'Look But Don't Touch', 'Take Me Down To The River', 'House Of Love', 'Money', 'How Lucky You Are', 'Perfect Day'... that's most of your set already. If we throw in a few new ones like 'Born To Rock And Roll' and 'Redemption', alongside things like 'Shine Your Light', we've pretty much got all we need. I think it's pointless trying to do surprises on this tour, we aim to play what we think people want to hear. The majority of the people there will be there for the Little Angels anyway, so if they are familiar with us at all, it'll be the earlier stuff I think.

**Do you think this will be Skin's last hurrah, or do you have to look at it as "never say never"?**

I think we've come to that point that it's worthless saying it'll be our last gig anymore. The desire within us to play is so strong, that if the circumstances are right, like this tour with the Angels, then we'd love to do it. We don't always know what the circumstances will be. We're not in a situation where we can keep touring ourselves because we can't make any money from that. But we can be strategic and if it's something that we'd really like to do and can do it

without losing money, then why wouldn't we?

**I hear Neville is working with a new band outside of Skin, like you have with Red White & Blues? I hope so - it's such a waste for his voice not to be utilised!**

Oh, I agree! He's got a project called Hand Of Dimes. I've not heard anything yet, but I'm sure it'll be fantastic. Like I say, there's a strong desire in all of us to keep playing. You're right, I think it's a crime against music really that Nev doesn't sing all the time. He's one of the best singers in the world. I'm really happy that he does choose to do it from time to time, and that he lets me be a part of it! (laughs)

**With all this going on, you've also been working on the next RW&B album. Do you know when that will be released?**

We're still working on ideas, we're not ready to record anything yet. When Matti comes over to do the shows, we'll have a chat then and I'll bounce some ideas off him. The main thing now though is to get these gigs played and look at new material in the New Year.

**When you spoke about rehearsing and having so few gigs to keep in gig shape, when you write your songs, do you take into account how difficult something might be to replicate live?**

No, I never really worry about that, whether I'll be able to play it live or not. Live, it's not so much the playing I worry about, it's more the gelling of the musicians on stage. To return to the football analogy, we all know the England players are fantastic individual players, but performing together at the highest level, things go wrong. It's a gelling thing, about feeling in sync with the others so it flows. Sometimes it happens, sometimes it doesn't - the more you do it, the better you get. There can be loads of things during a gig that can throw just one of us off. Because that one person is thrown, the rest of us are affected. The people in the audience may not even know what it is, it could be something as simple as a monitor feeding back. Suddenly the singer can't hear himself, he gets frustrated, then the other members pick up on that. If you know one of the band isn't happy, that will affect your playing. When everyone is flowing and completely in the zone, that's when it's perfect. It's that natural dynamic, which happens more when you've played more shows.

**With that in mind, as you have played all the Red White & Blues album live when you did the Steelhouse gig, were there any songs that didn't feel right the first time you played them? Often I hear musicians say about songs being difficult to recreate live, just like some live songs are elusive to capture in the studio?**

The hardest song to play is 'A Little Too Late' because of how it builds. In the studio, you can easily make the drums quieter, even if they were played quite hard. You can place emphasis on an acoustic guitar or a vocal. When you play live, you can't just do that, drums are loud in a live environment, especially on a small stage! It's making sure the message and feel of the song don't get lost due to the volume of playing a gig. The majority of the set had the band full on, so to get a subtle, intimate song across, we play it more acoustically and tend to cut the rest of the band sound out. It's little things like that you have to think about.

**I assume, from what I've seen on Youtube, that 'Stand Up For Rock And Roll' is one of the highlights to play?**

Yeah, that's obviously one of the big songs of the night. It's almost like we build up to that over the course of the set. That's the song that kind of sums it all up for us when we put the band together. We wanted to champion the cause for rock and roll, wear on our sleeve what we think classic rock is all about. That's our interpretation. I think that will always be the message of the band.

**Anything else we need to know?**

You've covered everything with great questions James - as always, we're very appreciative of being given the chance to play our music and very appreciative of the fans who support the band, and people like yourself and Fireworks who support us and help spread the word. I hope to see you all in Grimsby!

**Update: Since this interview, Red White & Blues have been confirmed as support for the three Lynyrd Skynyrd gigs in November, making Myke even busier!**