



LITTLE drummer boy

One half of Smith and Burrows and Razorlight drummer Andy Burrows credits his Winchester childhood for setting him up for stardom

WORDS: Jeremy Blackmore ♦ PHOTOS: Courtesy of PIAS



Andy Burrows has played arenas around the world as drummer with multi-platinum selling indie band Razorlight, co-written a number one single and won a BAFTA nomination for a film soundtrack. All roads though lead back to Winchester, a musical grounding in the Hampshire County Youth Band and a childhood obsession with percussion. We caught up with Andy as he prepares to return to the county to headline the Big Top Stage at the Isle of Wight Festival with the newly reformed Razorlight. He is also busy promoting new album *Only Smith And Burrows Is Good Enough* with Editors frontman Tom Smith. The range of projects he's involved in remain as varied as ever.

It is his formative years in Winchester though that he credits for his success. 'I absolutely adored my childhood there. It's a very beautiful place. I made a lot of friends that I've continued to have through the rest of my life. It just feels magical, like home.'

Andy's dreams though lay far beyond the city walls. Fixated with music as early as he can remember, he played Beatles compilation *Ballads* and Michael Jackson's *Bad* repeatedly and became fascinated by drum kits.

Despite this, he ended up having cornet lessons at Western Primary School and joined the Hampshire County Youth Band for a year. His attention though was elsewhere. 'All I could do is stare at the percussion section at the back all the time. It was watching the drummers on *Top of The Pops* on a Thursday and then watching the percussion section at the back of the brass band and just being totally obsessed.'

Perhaps fearing the inevitable cacophony of sound at the family home, his parents were less than keen on young Andy getting his own drumkit. It became a 'real taboo subject', he recalls. But he started playing drums at school and then percussion with the county band. He never looked back.

'Aside from listening to The Police, Elvis Costello and The Who records that my dad had, the Hampshire County Youth Band was very much my musical education. I learned a lot about reading music, I did all my grades. I wasn't much cop at school, but I was really into music. It was a big part of my social and musical upbringing.'

Tours to Germany, California and New Hampshire gave him a first glimpse of life on the road, preparing him, if only on a small scale, for future world tours with Razorlight. 'I often think that in the heady days of Razorlight

'Hampshire County Youth Band was very much my musical education. I learned a lot'

when we were at our most crazy in terms of international travel. Obviously, it was very different. You'd go on a two-week trip with a few friends on a coach. But I feel like it was a good setup.'

He formed a few bands while at the Westgate School in Winchester in his early teens and joined a covers band who played regular gigs at Broughton Village Hall. In a moment of serendipity,

future Razorlight producer and legendary Beatles and Sex Pistols producer Chris Thomas attended some of those gigs.

'They would sort of smuggle me in the bass drum case to do pub gigs. We played our first gig at the Railway Inn. I think I was about 13 or 14. That was very exciting!'

Things turned more serious when Andy turned 16 and joined the band User (later called Stag), who spent the next seven years playing regularly at the Railway and other local pubs as well as occasional gigs in London.

Success seemed distant though and by his early 20s he began to wonder if he would ever realise his ambitions. 'It was getting to the point where I was like, "oh, gosh, maybe my big dream was a bit overambitious after all". I remember mooching around Winchester and thinking, all my mates have just come back with degrees and I don't really know what I've got to show for the last seven years.'

A dramatic change of fortunes though was just around the corner. He first met Johnny Borrell at one of Stag's gigs at the Joiners in Southampton where the Razorlight frontman complimented him on his



Andy Burrows (left) and Tom Smith have just launched their new album *Only Smith And Burrows Is Good Enough*

ABOVE: Tom (left) and Andy were good friends before they started recording



drumming. He did not join the band until later though when he attended an open audition.

First impressions were favourable, and he was invited back the next day for a second audition. The atmosphere was immediately positive. Andy became concerned though when two days went without any official word, so he called Razorlight's manager to ask for feedback. 'He was, like, you're in the band. Didn't anyone tell you? We need you up here in two days, and then we're off on tour next

ABOVE: Razorlight has just announced their return as headline act at the Isle of Wight festival

BELOW: Andy's friendship with Tom Smith has led to the pair writing a couple of albums together

week. Literally, apart from having children that was the most life-changing weekend I've ever experienced.

'I really came into the band as the promotion and the touring was getting going. So, we forged that sound and that bond together really early on. It was just completely magical. It always sounds so cheesy when I talk about it, but it was a complete dream come true.'

Five hugely successful years followed. The self-titled album *Razorlight* hit number one in

2006 and spawned the chart-topping single *America*, a co-write with Johnny.

'It was never really my intention to be a songwriter. I specifically only ever really

'You're in the band. Didn't anyone tell you? We need you up here in two days'

wanted to be a drummer in a band. But I'm very grateful for the fact that Johnny was very encouraging. I guess he saw something in me and decided to coax it out of me. So, then I was "oh, I'm 25, and I guess I'm a songwriter". I just sort of started off the wrong way around!

Andy left Razorlight in 2009 and built a burgeoning CV as session drummer, producer, composer, arranger and songwriter. He joined the band *We Are Scientists* and released



solo albums under his own name and as I Am Arrows.

He collaborated with Ilan Eshkeri on the BAFTA nominated soundtrack to animated short film *The Snowman and The Snowdog* (follow-up to *The Snowman*) and composed the soundtrack for Ricky Gervais' *After Life*, as well as creating the inspirational *Reasons To Stay Alive* album with author Matt Haig. Having left Razorlight he was keen to try his hand at as many things as possible. 'Because Razorlight exploded as quickly as it did, I really was keen to almost pick up where I didn't realise I'd left off as a youngster. I'm not an over-the-top confident person, but because it gave me a bit of self-worth, I just had this really overwhelming desire to want to try as many things as I could.'

BELOW: Andy has enjoyed promoting his current album with Editors' frontman, Tom Smith (left)

It was his musical grounding in Winchester that equipped him for this new chapter. 'I'm so grateful for a lot of the things that either my parents or my teachers encouraged me to do when I was younger. I didn't really realise just how helpful it's been to everything I've done as an adult.'

'I guess I could always express myself musically and I enjoyed doing that, but I don't think I had the confidence previously. Once I got really stuck into songwriting, I realised that pulling a lot of those things from my past, a lot of the more classical side of things that I'd done in the brass bands and reading music, came in handy.'

One of Andy's best-loved projects came from his close friendship with Tom Smith. In 2008, Andy had recorded a solo

album *The Colour of My Dreams*, to raise awareness and funds for the Naomi House & Jacksplace hospices for children and young people near Winchester. The album set poems by local poet and family friend Peter Dixon to music. To help Andy promote the album, Tom offered to join him on the round of radio appearances and later on the I Am Arrows tour. It morphed into a beloved Christmas album *Funny Looking Angels* in 2011.

'I was just always so impressed,' says Andy. 'My heart was warmed by his eagerness to join in, given that he's a big rock star and stuff, it was quite nice that he was up for joining in with his mate.'

Part of the Smith and Burrows magic is their blend of voices, a mix of Editors' slightly darker tones with Andy's lighter pop sensibilities. 'We always knew that when we did finally get around to making another album that we wanted one that didn't have any relation to a season. Not that we're going to go into some heavy touring schedule. But I think it's just really nice for us both to have Smith and Burrows as just this lovely place that we can retreat to sometimes.'

Now that venues are reopening, Andy is excited to be playing for audiences again. A further Razorlight tour is planned at the end of the year and the band are also recording new music. But what was it like getting back in a room with his former bandmates again?

'It was all the emotions at once, to be honest with you. It felt brilliant to play the songs that we haven't played together for 11 years and to remember so much of it so instantly. It was an incredible feeling.'

There are few gaps in Andy's diary this year with work on the soundtrack for *After Life* season three, the Razorlight tour and a new solo album in the works.

'I don't quite know where that fits in,' he ponders. 'But I'm desperate to do that as well. I don't want to bombard people with too much Burrows!'

He still visits his family in Winchester as much as possible. 'I can't wait to drive down and go visit the Railway, Black Boy or The Fullood Arms, where I used to work! I adore the place.' 🐾

