

Wendy Matthews is one of Australia's most recognised female artists. **She is about to kickstart her North Coast tour to promote her latest album, *The Welcome Fire*.** Nicci Seccombe caught up with Wendy and asked about her music, the North Coast and her no. 1 fan - her Border Collie, Bear...

# WENDY MATTHEWS



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**N**ear the end of 2013 you released your first original album in 12 years, called *The Welcome Fire*. Why so long between original albums?

It really is that life goes on. I have a pretty weird relationship with time, and it goes a lot quicker than I think it does. I have just been touring and building a little house and a garden. I just made a conscious decision to take some time off and open myself up to all of that stuff again.

**I see on the album that you co-wrote or wrote every song. Where do you draw your inspiration from?**

Oh my goodness ... Life and love is plenty, believe me. I have journals and ideas, titles and bits of poetry. I have a little secret agent dictator phone that I sing ideas into. I don't read or write music, so I am not a disciplined writer, so it was really something for me to have to sit down with some people I didn't know and some people I did know. I sort of allow myself to be a little bit of an idiot, because I have to sing them chords that I hear and for them to find the chords that I hear in my head. All of the songwriters I worked with were very generous. Each was a completely unique exchange.

***The Welcome Fire* has been critically acclaimed by your peers and music critics alike, saying it is your best work ever - yet it doesn't receive a lot of radio play. Does that annoy you?**

I really can't expect that. Regular people and the media see me from a certain time, so I don't really get airplay and that's just the way it is. But I have actually learnt a lot about putting out independent records and realising that there is a huge audience of people like me.

Those over 30 and 40 want to go to live gigs and they want to hear music and they would buy the records if someone puts their heart and soul into their music, so all I can hope for is that.

**You have just announced *The Welcome Fire* NSW Mid North Coast tour. When was the last time you brought the full band to places like Bellington, Laurieton, Armidale, Yamba and many of these other Mid North Coast Towns?**

Forever! It's been such a long time. God, last time we played Yamba with a band was years and years ago and I really do feel this is my home, so I am really looking forward to it a lot. Most of the guys in my band have been together for 25 years. They are actually some of my best friends, who obviously hung out at my place up here. It will be really nice just to cruise around and play this area with them.

**What can we expect from the shows?**

I have a fantastic band which has been a real blast at the moment, especially with this new stuff, but also I have 8 or 9 studio albums to choose from now, so it's lots of the old stuff that people will know. We have reworked a little bit and freshened up for ourselves. I am feeling a lot more open these days with smaller audiences. I love the intimacy. It will be a great evening for us, as well as hopefully them.

**What music are you listening to at the moment?**

Oh goodness ... I have 10 acres to look after. I occasionally blast something like the Blue Nile, which you have probably never heard of. They are a Scottish band from a few years back, but they're absolutely incredible. I don't really follow the industry as such. Every once in a while I will hear something that I love. I am not a huge radio listener. It really is stuff through word of

mouth that I have grown to like.

**What other artists, Australian or international, have you worked with, and what was that like?**

I learnt a lot in my days as a backing singer and plenty of Australian bands including folks like Jimmy Barnes, Icehouse. I worked a lot with Rob Hirst from Midnight Oil. I was a backing singer before I even put out my first record in 1990. It was a brilliant learning experience and very educational for me.

**Not only are you touring the NSW Mid North Coast, you actually live here? What town?**

I live a little north of Coffs Harbour, in the hinterland of the Northern Beaches, between Sapphire and Moonee. It's my dog and I on 10 acres, and it's incredible. I have built a little mud brick place over the years, and it's home. I can't wait to get home. I can never quite get enough time at home. It's an exquisite part of the world. I have been to beaches right up to Port Douglas and I thought, "You know what? Moonee just craps all over this". We have such a beautiful coastline and it's crazy that it's right next to a highway, but maybe that's the secret.

I bought my property in 2000. I lived in the Orara Valley while I was building my little place up here and moved in by about 2006.

**Tell us about your beloved Border Collie, Bear. We hear through the grapevine that Bear made her stage debut at the Jetty Theatre in Coffs a few years ago?**

That was hilarious. It was all her own work. Bear used to come on the road with me quite often, and after she showed me her little job that she wanted on the road, she has contin-

ued to do it. I am not sure if you are familiar with the Jetty Theatre dressing rooms? They are about two levels down from the stage, and she was downstairs in the dress-

ing room while we were all on stage and realised I had forgotten my set list. So just as I mentioned something, by sheer coincidence, Bear has a real thing about carrying bits of paper in her mouth, so she grabbed the set list, broke free and raced up onstage and dropped the set list at my feet. Ask anybody there ... it was hilarious. As everyone applauded, she turned around and looked into the lights and saw 300 potential ball throwers out there, and she just broke into this huge smile and body wiggle. She is retired now.

**Last but not least ... the 4 million dollar question. If you could sit down to dinner with anyone dead or alive, who would it be and why?**

This is going to sound really obscure, but I have her picture right in front of me. There was an American painter from the '50s called Georgia O'Keeffe, and I would love to sit down with her and pick her brains. She moved out to the desert by herself and lived there, just painting away. I admire her stamina as a solo woman and her courage. She is very clear headed.

Thanks Wendy.

 **the plug!**

Playing at Laurieton United Services Club on Sunday 8 June.

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