

## **Confessions of a puppeteer**

### **William talks to Bianca**

So imagine you're at a BBQ, say about three weeks ago and people are just sitting around talking about music and stuff and then someone says, "I'm doin some puppet stuff for the V festival" and then someone else says "oh yeah, what are ya doin?" and then the person to whom that question is directed says, "I'm doing a puppet show for Beck" and then as that's slowly sinking in someone else interjects the conversation and says, "Really? Can I help?" and then before the consequences of those few words coalesces with what's actually happening, you then hear the words, "Sure, I'll make a call". At that point the painful reality starts to gush on in that someone else other than yourself just wangled themselves into being on stage with Beck at the V festival.

**W: So how in hell did the opportunity arise for being a puppeteer for Beck?**

B: I don't know exactly what happened to his American Puppeteers, but they didn't come to Australia (there are managing to meet the band in Japan however) so they needed some locals to fill their shoes. The guys who made the puppets and who usually puppeteer did 'TEAM AMERICA'. Anyway Justin Stanley, Beck's guitarist is an ex-pat Australian and he was the connection. I was just there to make up the numbers.

**W: So how was it?**

B: How do ya reckon it was? It was fucking awesome. We got there in the afternoon and they showed us the puppets and how they worked. It was really cool; the puppets came in a massive road case with their own mini set and heaps of props. In fact, the puppets had more influence over the bands wardrobe than the band did. E.g. Keyboard player says: "what colour shirt am I supposed to wear tonight?" Puppeteers says: "Um...yellow" and off to wardrobe he went to find his yellow shirt and the rest of his costume.

As for the actual puppeteering, my task was a bit schizophrenic as I had to be two puppets simultaneously - bass and drums. I basically had to mimic their movements for the whole set. My poor arms and brain. It totally tested my hand/eye coordination to the limit. The first gig in Sydney was a bit rusty for everyone I think. Beck was sick and the vibe wasn't that great although I still enjoyed it. The second gig was much more relaxed and Beck was obviously in a better frame of mind 'cause he was talking more to the crowd and at some stage he got us to come out the front and puppeteer right next to him and the other band members. It was amazing how much his mood/health influenced the entire productions performance...

**W: What was going on back stage? Any goss?**

B: I was in the canteen at some point and Frank Black was just standing there checking out the menu board. The food was all right - noodles, baked dinners, nothing flash...you'd think they would've had lobsters or something for the Pixes! Ahhh...what

else? Jarvis is tall...and grey. The dudes from Nuevelle Vague are cool and very French. Beck's band is all lovely guys, not much ego going on there. Um...I can't tell you EVERYTHING; it'd spoil the magic for everyone.

**W: So did you get to be backstage when the Pixies played?**

B: The first night (in Sydney) they closed off the stage completely which was a bit of a bummer, but they played an amazing set, which I watched from the front. But at the Gold Coast gig, I got to watch from the side of stage, it was an amazing performance and the bands chemistry is still very strong after such a long time. I never thought I'd get to see them play let alone that close. I got to see the other 'Deal' sitting cross legged behind a big road case watching her sisters band in between knitting (!!!) and singing along to the whole set.

**W: How did you rate the V Festival from the other side?**

B: It was pretty cool kicking around at that level and being on stage in front of that many people. It's an incredible buzz, especially when you're on stage with such a high calibre of performers. It's funny, but even though it was surreal, it also just felt totally normal to be there. The festival thing is a bit weird though, 'cause you move on to the next festival in another state, and the layout is exactly the same. It could become a bit of a Ground Hog Day kind of vibe because you feel like it's "yesterday once more" (ahhh Karen was wise). I can imagine that if you did that all the time and never looked at the actual places you were in beyond the festival boundaries, you might go a little mad...