



**Under the lights:** Get ready for a dazzling spectacle at Muse's upcoming Stadium Negara show.

**With Muse, every gig is supermassive.**

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# A rocking revelation

**T**HOSE extraordinary scenes of hordes of rock fans queuing up for tickets during the Muse concert launch day at Sungei Wang Plaza in Kuala Lumpur last month must indicate the British rock trio's immense popularity here. Not much airplay, but Muse commands an enviable niche following.

Amazingly, there has hardly been a problem selling out this Muse concert, and it shows that music fans are ready to come out in the numbers to catch a quality international rock act.

Those recent IL Divo, Boyz II Men and (this weekend's) Cliff Richard gigs are hardly the sort of hip shows to ignite big stadiums and get the young masses excited. With Muse, the rock crowd here can, at last, experience a festival headlining act in peak form.

It's slightly over two weeks before Muse lands for its first show in Kuala Lumpur on Feb 25, plugging in an evening at Stadium Negara.

But as far as concerts go, the buzz surrounding Muse's concert has been steadily building since rumours of the band's South-East Asian concert trek surfaced last December.

Here's a band that headlined the Glastonbury music festival in England in 2004 coming to rock Stadium Negara. Maybe it's taken the band nearly 10 years to hit our shores – but how this outfit has evolved from a tentative art school rock act to magisterial modern day pomp-rock minstrels. Those Radiohead comparisons are long gone.

Having released four studio albums and a double-disc live set *Hullabaloo*, Muse is a band on the top of its game. Last July, these Devon, England-raised blokes returned to the rock frontlines with the *Black Holes and Revelations* album. This record, spanning the hits *Starlight*, *Supermassive Black Hole* and *Knights of Cydonia*, has sold over two million copies worldwide and received a Mercury Music Prize nomination in the process.

Muse was also voted as the BBC's favourite band of 2006. In terms of album consistency, the band has outdone itself with each record, from the breakthrough debut *Showbiz* (1999) through the awesome *Origin of Symmetry* (2001) and the electrifying *Absolution* (2003)



that took the trio up a notch as an arena force.

Such lofty heights didn't come without some hard touring work. Muse is currently on a world tour that will last until the end of summer (this September). But it has a few more dates left in this region to thrill the fans. During a recent Big Day Out stop in Sydney, Australia, the band's bassist Chris Wolstenholme took some time out to share his enthusiastic thoughts on this tour.

"It's our second time around performing at the Big Day Out and it's great. It's such a pleasurable tour here... it's so relaxed. Being in Australia is like being on holiday, the weather's great, everything's great," said the friendly sounding 28-year-old.

The last time Muse played the Big Day Out fest was in January 2004, sharing the Brit rock assault with The Darkness, Justin Hawkins and gang have faded away and how times have changed. Regardless of all the Franz, Kaisers and Arctic Monkeys hailing from the Brit scene, Muse can still count itself as one of the few Brit rock acts with international appeal and massive sales outside Britain.

The band has been on the road since last June and Wolstenholme acknowledges that this commitment is a very important part of the modern rock act's credentials.

"We've always been touring heavily. Playing live is important to us and, besides recording studio albums, we've gained a lot of fans through our live shows. That's one side of the band that is just as important and I feel truly comfortable touring. It's never been a problem for me. I enjoy it very much," he added.

Indeed, Wolstenholme is enjoying this road

trip a lot more. The bassist hurt his wrist during the *Absolution* tour, leading to a few cancelled shows. Then vocalist/guitarist/key-boardist Matthew Bellamy smashed into a guitar on stage and ripped his lips in the US while drummer Dominic Howard lost his father a few hours after the band walked off the Glastonbury stage. This current trek, needless to say, has been a much happier time for everyone in the band.

Bellamy, 28, Howard, 29, and Wolstenholme have a special kinship. They formed the band while still at school in Devon when they were 15-year-olds.

Wolstenholme related how the trio, all of whom hail from Teignmouth, Devon, came to be in 1994, and originally called themselves Rocket Baby Dolls.

"We were all playing in different bands in school, you know, just cover bands and it was Matt and Dom who asked me whether I would be interested in playing bass and doing back-up vocals for them. Of course, I said yes," said Wolstenholme.

## Talking bass

Interestingly, Wolstenholme only learned to play the bass when he was asked to join the band.

"The bass is the third instrument I learnt to play. I was originally a guitarist and I play drums as well. I picked up the bass when I was in Muse."

Wolstenholme, who is self-taught in bass, has become one of the more innovative bass players around. His use of effects and the fact that he learnt bass on his own contributed to his unique approach and sound of the instrument.

"I never had any bass lessons. All of us never had any lessons. I think that you get bogged down by technicals and you end up being either too technical or clinical. When you learn (an instrument) on your own, you develop your own character towards it."

Apart from chatting about the sun and sights in Sydney, he also explained a little about the use of effects.

"There are effects that you think sounds so 1980s but if you combine it with something

else, it might be something altogether new."

And when it comes to Muse, Wolstenholme explained the role of the bass and how he applies it. "In Muse, there's a lot of synthesizers so I usually lay down the bass by doubling up with what the synth is doing. I'm very open to making the bass sound different than what it is traditionally used for. It's important that I experiment especially in a band like Muse because there are only three of us."

As for new material from Muse, Wolstenholme said that they have written none at the moment since they are busy touring. And they prefer writing new material in the studio after they have finished touring.

"Previously, there were a few songs we'd written while on tour but only two of them ended in the album. It's better to develop ideas in the studio. The song *Newborn* (from their second album *Origin of Symmetry*) was written while we were on tour, though. We didn't have much time off from touring then and the album was recorded in sections."

Wolstenholme cited the variety of influences on their latest album, *Black Holes and Revelations*.

"Much of the guitar sounds are reminiscent of the 1990s from bands such as Nirvana and Rage Against The Machine. There's also the 1950s surf style guitar sound like Dick Dale.

"We've also been influenced by film soundtracks especially music from Ennio Morricone (who scored such classic spaghetti western films as *The Dollars Trilogy*). And there's a whole variety of synth stuff... each song in the album is really different and we've always made a different sounding album than the one before."

With such a range of sounds and influences on *Black Holes and Revelations*, what can fans expect of their new material?

"We have no master plan. We haven't decided how the new album is going to sound like yet but it's going to be a completely different approach than *Black Holes and Revelations*," he concluded.

**■ Muse will be playing Stadium Negara on Feb 25. The concert is sponsored by Tiger and organised by Galaxy. For enquiries, browse [www.tigermusic.com.my](http://www.tigermusic.com.my).**