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Justin Hayward of The Moody Blues

In 1965, The Moody Blues scored a UK #1 with just their second single, "Go Now." They toured with The Beatles, did the *Ed Sullivan Show*, and then in 1966... broke up.

A month later, three original members - Mike Pinder (mellotron), Ray Thomas (flute) and Graeme Edge (drums) - reformed the band with John Lodge on bass and Justin Hayward (replacing original member Denny Laine) on guitar. Lodge and Hayward became the primary songwriters and vocalists in the group, and in 1967, Decca Records asked them to record an album to demonstrate the new Deramic Stereo Sound technology. The result was *Days of Future Passed*, which mixed old rock & roll influences with American blues, psychedelic rock, and classical music. Featuring Justin's "Nights In White Satin," it remains a



treasured album in the rock canon.

What Hayward has to say about the Moody Blues' career may surprise you. Most of their hits came in the '60s and '70s, but Justin's decade of choice is the '80s, when the group joined the MTV era with the hits "I Know You're Out There Somewhere" and "Your Wildest Dreams." And their signature song - "Nights in White Satin" - Justin tells us that a certain underappreciated soul singer recorded the definitive version.

Hayward is excited about his latest solo album, *Spirits of the Western Sky*, which focuses on various relationships in his life. As he spoke about this latest effort, in addition to some of the biggest hits he's recorded with the famous band he fronts, Hayward was bright and cheery, and neither moody, nor blue.

Dan MacIntosh (Songfacts): This is an interview for Songfacts.

Justin Hayward: I checked out the Website. It's interesting.

Songfacts: Well, I hope this will be an interesting interview for you.

Justin: Yeah, me too.

Songfacts: Some of your songs you've been singing for quite a while; I'm sure you must do "Nights in White Satin" every night that you perform.

Justin: Yes.

Songfacts: Do the songs take on new meanings for you as you sing them? I mean, do you find new feelings and emotions when you sing those songs that are so familiar?

Justin: I never lose the emotion of songs like that. "I Know You're Out There Somewhere" is another one like that. And "Question" is another one. But not yet. I'm lucky enough not to have lost the emotion or the motivation, because it's a wonderful thing to be able to share. And the audience provides the emotion around that. Because you do it in sound check and it's fine, but when there's an audience there, it completely transforms the experience.

But with "Nights," something strange happened last year. Somebody sent me a link to a cover version of "Nights" by a woman called Bettye LaVette.

Bettye LaVette is a soul singer who grew up in Detroit, in the shadow of Motown Records. Although many of her peers were Motown artists, LaVette never got the chance to record for that important label. She was signed to Atlantic Records, where Aretha Franklin was also an artist, yet she didn't have the success Franklin achieved there. She tells her hard luck story in a wonderful autobiography titled *A Woman Like Me*.

Songfacts: Oh, yes.

Justin: She covered "Nights," and somebody sent it to me as an MP3, a link. I was sitting in bed with my laptop waking up to my emails, and I clicked on this link and I burst into tears. My wife came in and she said, "What the hell's the matter with you?" And I said, "You've got to listen to this." She didn't cry. But I heard the lyric for the first time. There have

been hundreds, maybe thousands of covers of "Nights in White Satin," but that was the first time I heard it for real.

Songfacts: It's so interesting that you would say that, Justin, because I just finished her autobiography, and she doesn't pull any punches. She talks about doing cocaine with very famous people, and she talks about her life very frankly. But she also talks about doing an album where she covers a lot of songs by primarily British rock songwriters.

Justin: That's right. That was the album it was on. If you're in touch with her, please tell her what I said. Her interpretation is the best ever, and there have been hundreds.

Songfacts: I don't know her personally, but I know her publicist. And I will shoot off an e mail to her this afternoon and let her know.

Justin: Thank you.

Songfacts: Let's talk about some of the other songs. You mentioned "Question." Were there any events that inspired you to write a song like that where you were really questioning the whole state of the world and war and peace?

Justin: It was to do with the fact that we'd achieved great success in the United States and we were playing a lot of student venues and colleges, and the student audience was our audience. We were mixing with these people and seeing how different the problems were for them and the issues in being a member of the greatest nation on earth: the United States. How different they were from British people. I was just expressing my frustration around that, around the problems of anti-war and things that really concerned them,

and for their own future that they may be conscripted, or whatever you call it... I can't remember what the word is in America.

Songfacts: Drafted?

Justin: Drafted. Yes. How that would morally be a dilemma for them and that kind of stuff. So it did really come out of that. And my own particular anger at what was happening. After a decade of peace and love, it still seemed we hadn't made a difference in 1970. I suppose that was the theme of the song. And then the slow part of the song is really a reflection of that and not feeling defeated, but almost a quiet reflection of it, and mixing with a bit of a love song, as well.

Songfacts: Now, I imagine you still do that song in concert these days. Do you think about other political situations when you're singing that?

Justin: There's no doubt that it still resonates, the lyrics reflect whichever generation you're in. Whatever time you're in, people are experiencing those emotions. And I find that people identify with it at any age.

Songfacts: Well, I want to skip ahead to some of your more recent hit songs. I was reading about "Your Wildest Dreams" and "I Know You're Out There Somewhere." Somebody had written that the Moody Blues had become almost like a synth pop band, and I realize that you're a guitarist. Was that uncomfortable for you when the band started going in that direction away from music that might have featured more of what you do best as a guitarist.

Justin: No. Because I was playing the synth most of the

time. I discovered the DX7 when that came out and it changed my life. And I still use a DX7. Most of "Wildest Dreams" - 90% of it - is Tony Visconti, my DX7, and a guitar synth. The piece at the beginning of "Wildest Dreams" that sounds like a sort of Theremin, a (humming) "oooo ooo," that's a guitar synth. All of that is. So it was just another way of exploring musical avenues. Tony Visconti was very much into that and the first person who really turned the band on to programming in a serious way. And he was very, very good at it, so I enjoyed every moment of that.

And in truth, if I had to pick a decade of music, if I could only have one decade of music that I could listen to, it would be the '80s.

Songfacts: Interesting. So that was like a second birth in a way.

Justin: It was wonderful for us, those two records, to have a hit when you're 40 and to be recognized in the streets. Not that people know your name, they just say, "Oh, you're the guy in the Moody Blues video" or something, that was a wonderful thing.

Songfacts: The song "I Know you're Out There Somewhere," is that about somebody in particular?

Justin: Yes. It was about somebody in particular. And I found with "Wildest Dreams" that it was a common experience for a lot of people. I never thought this; I thought I was writing a frivolous sort of song. Certainly with "Wildest Dreams." Not with "I Know You're Out There Somewhere," because I knew by then. But I thought "Wildest Dreams" would be a throwaway thing that people wouldn't really take

much notice of lyrically. But I found out that it was a common experience and desire by a lot of people. So that was very revealing.

And with "I Know You're Out There Somewhere," yes, they both were about at least one particular person. I wouldn't say it was all about one person, but at least one particular person. And my advice to anybody who wants to go back is that you can never go home. And best to leave the past as the past.

Songfacts: You have a new solo album out. When you do your solo music, do you go to a different place creatively than when you work with the Moody Blues?

Justin: Yes, I think so. Maybe not initially. Except that I recorded quite a few more songs. This is a romantic album about relationships and people that I know. Some people will probably recognize themselves in these songs. It's just acquaintances I have - as I get older, I have an awful habit of falling in love with lots of people, boys and girls around me. I don't mean physically rolling around, I just mean emotionally and forming attachments to people.

So I found that was what I enjoyed most about the collection of songs that I hadn't recorded. I have got some other ones that are more kind of social comment, but they're probably for another album. I realized that early on in the compiling of this album in the last two years. It's a very personal album, and some of the things on this album I probably could not have said in a Moody Blues song or I would have changed it so that it was a voice speaking for a group, not for an individual.

Songfacts: That's very interesting. I notice as I get older

that I realize how important relationships are. It sounds like that's been reflected in how you write songs, you're writing about those people.

Justin: It is. Yes. You hit it on the head, I couldn't have said it any better. Relationships are more precious to me now than ever. And I'm more conscious of people wanting to give to me now their affection and their regard and their love, really. That's nice.

Songfacts: When you think about all the music that you've recorded with the Moody Blues, so many songs and so many albums, do you have favorite songs that you never get tired of performing?

Justin: Yes. Of course, "Nights," because it's a magic that you can throw over an audience and you can go anywhere in the world and it's rewarding. I recorded another song that was a hit in the UK called "Forever Autumn." You can go anywhere in the world and play that and people really like it. But there are a few other things that are very close to me. There's a song called "New Horizons," which was at a really tough time in my life. I'd not long lost my father. There was quite a lot of death around me, and I was having to cope with that and work out how you handle that and what you do and how you can get through it. It's very poignant to me.



Photo: Marcus Way

And there's another song on a solo album called "Raised on Love" that not many people would know. But that's very dear to me, as well. But "I Know You're Out There Somewhere" is probably my favorite. That and a song called "Driftwood," which was also kind of bittersweet.

Songfacts: It sounds to me like when we were talking earlier about valuing relationships, it's almost as if you value your songs as if they are people, like you have relationships with them. Do you look at it that way sometimes?

Justin: That's a very interesting question. I'm thinking about that, Dan. Yes, I think I do. Yes. Actually, even before they're done, they're just unfinished characters that need to be filled out a bit and colored in. But yes, I do have a relationship with them, and each one is very different, each relationship is very different. Some I'm a little scared of, they're a bit spooky.

Songfacts: Justin, it's been such a treat to talk to you. And I hope this was not too taxing on you.

Justin: Absolutely not at all. It's a great pleasure. I did check your Web site, and it's very interesting. And of course lots of people contribute, lots of people are wrong, and lots of people are right. You must find that quite amusing. Because everybody's got something to say about songs that they love.

Songfacts: Well, one of the real treats for me is to be able to talk to the people that write the songs and get clarity. And you've helped me do that in a great way, and I appreciate your time so much.

Justin: Well, I'd say two things about songs. The early songs it would be Mike Pinder, the keyboard player and Mellotron

player. I'll just say that. And then the '80s songs would be Tony Visconti. And then more recently I've taken that responsibility myself. So with my solo albums and this latest album, it's me who's playing the character around it.

Songfacts: Well, that's a clue. So I'm going to take that as I continue my investigation into your music. Thank you so much for being such a wonderful interview. This has been a true treat for me.

Justin: Oh, a great pleasure. My best wishes to you.