



Lighting up the stage

It took a decade for The Lumineers to reach overnight success

If he wasn't the vocalist and guitarist of American folk-rock band The Lumineers, Wesley Schultz believes he'd be working in psychology.

The Lumineers perform in Cape Town on 26 April and Johannesburg on 28 April. Tickets available from www.bigconcerts.com and Computicket

"My father was a psychologist and I gravitated toward it," he says.

"I was and am fascinated by people and the things we do to cope with life."

But music fascinated him more. His love began when he was a child, learning the words to all the songs his father would play on the car radio. Then, at 16, he began playing the guitar. "As soon as I began playing, I began writing songs," he explains. "They weren't good songs, but that didn't matter."

While Schultz and band co-founder Jeremiah Fraites (drums and percussion) grew up in the same hometown, they didn't really become friends until Schultz came back from college. "He was still in New Jersey, commuting to school, and three years younger," Schultz says. "A mutual friend insisted we play together, which we did eventually, dragging our feet the whole way."

From there, the band had what Schultz describes as "a merry-go-round of third players".

"It wasn't until we moved from New York to Denver that we found Neyla [Pekarek, cello and vocals] through a Craigslist ad, and then Stelth [Ulvang, piano] and Ben [Wahamaki, bass] through the music scene in Denver," he explains.

Learning curve

What does Schultz remember best about the first time he performed live?

"The enormous fear," he says. "For a period of probably five years, for every day we had a show, I would have trouble sleeping and eating. I was wondering if I should be doing this, if this is how my mind responds."

But the process of playing and singing allowed him to get lost in the music and relax. "It was the only thing I'd ever experienced like that," he says. "Eventually I was able to get some confidence with it, and that fear and anxiousness only happens about 10 minutes before we take the stage."

Even though the band toured relentlessly for a few years, Schultz remembers having no money. "We'd sleep on people's floors and couches. Often people who were at the shows offered us a place to stay. If we had money, we'd buy some groceries and make sandwiches on our laps in the minivan."

Schultz also remembers believing in what they were doing, even when others didn't.

"We'd go on a month-long tour around the country, and return to our terrible jobs, and being laughed at," he says. "One person asked, 'How'd the tour go?' and before I could answer, interrupted my response with, 'Couldn't have gone that well; you're back here, aren't you?'"

Experiences like this forced the band to be honest about themselves, how good the music was, and how much time they were devoting to their craft. "When you're spending 40 hours at a job you hate and 15 hours at music every week, it's not a recipe for success," Schultz explains.

These setbacks also taught the band not to buy into the hype or into the feelings of failure. "You have to develop a sense of what you think works and is good for you," Schultz says.

The big time

Then, after 10 years that Schultz describes as wrought with failure and disappointment, came success. The band's 'debut' album sold three million copies and their single *Ho Hey* (over 160 million YouTube views) became a hit.

"People thought this was our first record, but we'd made a lot of music leading up to it, and played a tonne of shows," he explains. "I'm thankful for the setbacks. The benefit of failure is enormous."

The Lumineers generated award buzz, receiving nominations for Best New Artist and Best Americana Album at the 2013 Grammy Awards. Although the band was asked to perform at the show, they didn't win. But Schultz doesn't seem fazed. "Two-time Grammy losers, The Lumineers," he jokes. "Has a nice ring to it."

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