

UNDER THE RADAR

A 'trippy hippy' thrill of making people smile inspires the mad musical scientists behind Underworld, the headline act at Summafieldayze, writes **Sally Browne**

IN an abandoned aircraft hangar on the outskirts of London, top-secret testing regularly takes place.

It's here that the guys from Underworld — long-term musical partners Karl Hyde and Rick Smith — make magic.

They'll test out giant inflatable structures, lights, screens, sound equipment and artworks for their epic live shows, which they take around the world.

"It's in the middle of nowhere so we don't bother anybody," says vocalist, instrumentalist and visual artist Hyde.

And it's just one of several studios the mad musical scientists work from.

"Where we are in Essex (county), there were a lot of airfields left over from the second world war, so there are industrial buildings from that period that have been re-used many times over the years by farmers."

It's a frosty morning in the UK, and Hyde is looking out the window of his home watching the pink sky turn blue. Soon he'll be swapping British winter for an Australian summer as he headlines the Summafieldayze festival at the Gold Coast.

Change isn't a problem for this band. Underworld are the masters of reinvention. These are the guys who brought you top 10 ARIA hit *Underneath the Radar* in 1988 and then the vastly different *Born Slippy NUXX* from the movie *Trainspotting* eight years later.

They've been touring the world solidly for the past two years and recently curated art exhibitions at

galleries in New York and Japan. And, no, they're not sick of each other yet.

"After 27 years?" Hyde laughs. "No, we're not sick of each other funnily enough... Upset with each other — argue, row, shout even, sometimes — but never sick of each other, no."

"The bottom line is Rick is the most inspiring musician I've ever worked with and I've worked with a lot of musicians over my time. There's something about his attitude, his Welshness maybe, the way he looks at the world that constantly inspires me, no matter what mood I'm in."

The pair also work closely with Australian artist John Warwicker, whom they describe as the third member of the team, and have done since the late 1970s. They collaborate every day over the internet and host an online art studio.

"The only way I can describe Underworld is in making things," says Hyde. "I have no idea until we make things."

It was *Trainspotting*, the 1996 film directed by Danny Boyle and starring Ewan McGregor, that catapulted Underworld on to the international stage. Since then, doors have opened to them everywhere.

They composed the soundtrack to the film *Breaking and Entering* by Anthony Minghella, and Boyle's 2007 sci-fi film, *Sunshine*.

The soundtrack work delayed their last album, *Oblivion With Bells*,

by about a year but the pair are busy again in secret hideaways, and this year will be working with another mad musical genius, Brian Eno.

And there will be the continued thrill of more live shows.

"I know it sounds cliché, but we're blessed to be doing a job that involves turning people on and bringing a smile," says Hyde. "And when people start smiling and getting some joy going all that energy comes back to us on stage — and there's this whole cycle of good vibes that are happening."

"I guess it sounds a bit trippy hippy, but if that wasn't the case, it would make it very hard to go out on tour."

Summafieldayze is held at Doug Jennings Park, Gold Coast, on January 3.



Underworldfile



BROTHERS IN SOUND

Underworld are Karl Hyde and Rick Smith, two British musicians who have been working together since the 1970s.

BORN SLIPPY

The group was formed in Romford, Essex, a place which they mention in their international dance hit, *Born Slippy (NUXX)*. The song became famous through the Danny Boyle movie, *Trainspotting*. Much of the rest of the lyrics are unintelligible and reflect the befuddled state of a heavy night out.

THRESOME

For several years, two became three with the addition of DJ Darren Emerson, who left the group in 2002. The band also credit Aussie artist John Warwicker, with whom they collaborate, as the group's unofficial third member.

HITS & MISSES

Their tracks have remained club anthems. *Two Months Off* ("you bring light in") was a huge hit for the group in 2002. Underworld are also known for their soundtracks, having

composed for directors Danny Boyle and Anthony Minghella. Not all of their soundtrack work has been as well used, however. They were disappointed with the use of their song *Moaner* in the 1997 film, *Batman and Robin*, saying it was far too low in the mix.

SWITCHED ON

Embracing the digital revolution, Underworld host on-line concerts, web radio shows and release music online. Their latest album, *Oblivion With Bells* was released in 2007.