



FUNKY FAMILY

NEW ZEALAND'S BATUCADA SOUND MACHINE IS BREATHTAKING MIX OF BRAZILIAN, FUNK, HIP HOP, REGGAE AND PACIFIC SOUL. KIM FISHER GETS READY TO IGNITE THE BECK'S MUSIC BOX DANCE FLOOR WITH VOCALIST JAMES HUGHES.



James Hughes is at his desk staring out the window at the beautiful Auckland day and dreaming of a time when Batucada Sound Machine will be his day job. Coming to our shores to play the Perth Festival, Hughes, the head member responsible for vocals, percussion and keys, says Batucada Sound Machine are all about passion for their music. The band is based around a passion for fusing Brazilian and Cuban music with contemporary sounds and started as an impromptu 'Batucada' (a sub style of samba) sessions, which evolved into the band we see today.

Hughes says he has always admired Brazilian and Cuban style musicians and has had no trouble finding other musicians who share his passion. "We formed probably about 2003. I'd been overseas studying a lot of Brazilian and Cuban stuff and started jamming with some people in the Auckland scene. It really developed on its own and we'd get big crowds coming along and it just grew from there," Hughes explains.

So did Hughes set out to create a band based around the musical styles of Brazil and Cuba? "I've always been very interested in Brazilian stuff and the other guys play a lot of hip hop and funk, so we're trying to bring those styles together. It's hard to do that in a clean way, without making it sound forced. That's been the challenge, making it as natural as possible because you can so easily fall into that trap," he explains, adding that he wants to take inspiration from those styles, without

merely being a copy-cat version, just in New Zealand instead of Brazil or Cuba.

"I have spent a lot of time there, but not as a band, we haven't played in Brazil yet. I spent about a year in Rio and I've studied with Brazilian percussionists and I spent a couple of months in Cuba a few years ago studying as well. There are a lot of amazing players in these countries who haven't necessarily studied themselves, they're just naturally really talented."

Hughes says having a band with three times as many members as most can be a challenge. "At one stage our band had about 15 people in it, with lots of percussionists and DJs and then we kind of chopped it down to 11 or 12, but at the moment it's still pretty massive. We've got great players and a lot of great input," enthuses Hughes. "It is a challenge, but we have a core group of guys who write the music, our guitarist, bass player and myself kind of write most of the stuff. It's not necessarily the quickest process but sometimes it happens quickly when someone has a pretty complete idea, but often they start off as a small idea that gets worked on.

"We see it as a challenge, but now everyone has their own outlet to say it should go this way or that way and it works well. On tour, we're like a big family, we just have to make sure we have a big enough van and just pile in, it keeps it entertaining at all times. We've got a couple of girls in the band with makes it a nice dynamic, if it's all guys it's not so good, no-one wants that."

Performing at festivals is a highlight for Hughes, who says Batucada Sound Machine are excited to play the Perth Festival, as long as everyone is in high spirits. "I really like festivals because people are there 99 percent of the time to have fun. We enjoy our own shows obviously as well, but it's not the same as playing a big outdoor festival," he says. "The atmosphere is always so good and everyone comes there to have a good time and see lots of different music."

WHO: Batucada Sound Machine

WHEN & WHERE: Perth Festival – Sunday 15 February, Beck's Music Box, Perth