



BATUCADA SOUND MACHINE

Moving To Their Own Rhythm & Rhyme

Batucada Sound Machine are playing at the Beck's Music Box on Sunday, 15 February, as part of the Perth International Arts Festival. JOSHUA HAYES speaks with bandleader James Hughes.

We all know that our city is, well, a little isolated. But when a New Zealand band embarks on a near-month long tour of the UK two years before they set foot in Perth, you begin to wonder just how isolated we are.

Fortunately the *Perth International Arts Festival* is, as always, bringing a range of diverse and talented musicians to play at the Beck's Music Box this year, including self described Afro-Brazilian Hip Hop ensemble Batucada Sound Machine.

"It's actually pronounced *ba-too-car-da*," says James, who is also one of the group's percussionists, correcting my butchering of the group's name. "Batucada is a Brazilian word and it means, it's like, you know when you see Rio Carnival and there's 300 drummers all playing samba marching down the street? That's a Batucada group."

While not quite that large, the group still boasts a formidable 13 players and consists of five percussionists, three horn players, two guitarists, a bass player, a drummer and rapper MC Hazaduz (although many members of the group play other instruments and contribute vocals).

The group originated when James returned to New Zealand, after spending three years living in Latin America and studying percussion. "We started off a little bit of an improv night where we had a whole bunch of drummers improvising, and me directing different rhythms, mixing drum and bass with

some samba and what-have-you," explains James.

"Pretty soon we had emcees coming up and going '*Shit, what's this? What's that beat?*' and '*Can I rip on top of that?*' and then they'd grab the microphone. Then suddenly a couple of horns players would turn up next week and then a friend of mine who's a bass player brought a bass along, a double bass, and then some guitarists and pretty soon we had a new vocalist."

At one point the group swelled to 18 members, although James notes that it was a *turn up on Saturday night, everyone that wants to come and play* '18."

Numerous festival appearances and club gigs in New Zealand and the east coast of Australia led to a UK tour at the end of 2006.

"We did 14 gigs every night in this venue for two weeks straight, from two til five in the morning, every night, that was hardcore but we just juggled all our body clocks around. I think after about the third night we all got used to it and we ended up going to the pub down the road which opened up at 6:30am, and we the first customers," James adds, laughing.

They are also making tentative plans to do more recording later in the year, but in the meantime they will at the *Perth International Arts Festival*, representing New Zealand's eclectic music scene.

"I guess there seems to be a style of music that is less focused on the mechanics of song writing and more about the musicality," James says of his home country "The last year has seen the band really develop I think, in terms of its playing and everyone's really comfortable with their roles," James adds. "We're really looking forward to coming over."