

Mr Cat and the Jackal spin us a yarn



By [Ruth Cooper](#)

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BizLounge recently met up with Gertjie Besselsen and Jacques du Plessis, founding members of Mr Cat and the Jackal. With the recent unleashing of their second album "[Sins and Sirens Songs](#)" and a new video release imminent, we thought it best to gain a little more insight into this unique band.



How has the response to the new album been so far?

Jacques: Good, good especially with the design. We were really excited about it.

Gertjie: If someone is going to be buying an album instead of downloading, it might as well be a good package.

Who did the design for you and what was the concept behind it?

Jacques: Arno Kruger did it. We've been working with him for a couple of years, the concept really came from a children's bible and actually being quite literal in the sense of the illustration as well as what's the song's about.

What was the recording process like?

Gertjie: Long. We've worked on it from the beginning of last year. We really thought about what we wanted to put in each song, each little sound.

The album has been described as being socially suspicious. Could you explain that a bit more?

Gertjie: Well, a lot of the songs are stories about nothing really, but a couple - like Mother Tongue - is about paranoia, white guilt and like the *swart gevaar* is coming to get you. There are songs about loss and people generally being evil.

Thirty-seven instruments is quite intense. You invented some of them. Which are the most interesting?

Gertjie: We've created the banjo guitar.

And you use a human skull?

Jacques: Well not quite a skull, it's a human head. It's the skull inside our heads.

You worked with director Thomas Ferreira for the video The Devil Always Wants To

Dance. What's his appeal?

Jacques: He's good, he gets the job done. He helped us a lot with the concept.

What exactly is the concept?

Gertjie: It's one take, one shot. Sitting round a table and then instruments, burning instruments ...

Jacques: ... start falling in slow motion.

Gertjie: We didn't really have a big budget, obviously, so we had to think of a concept that would work within the budget - so we settled on one shot. The whole video took place in about five seconds and then it's slowed down to three-and-a-half minutes.

You guys started out in theatre.

Jacques: Yes, before even Mr Cat and the Jackal started we did a theatre production and out of that came the concept for the band.

Gertjie: Playing to a sit-down crowd in a theatre is what we prefer, where we feel more at home.

Will you ever do your own theatrical production as the band?

Gertjie: Yes, that's something we really want to do. After this album is out and we've done our shows we definitely want to move into a more theatrical realm. Theatre and entertainment need to meet somewhere - people must stop thinking of theatre as being this weird big concept thing.

Would you say the theatrical background gives you an edge over other bands when it comes to performing?

Gertjie: Yeah, definitely. I studied cabaret. That characterisation, it comes naturally.

Sure you get asked this a lot, but why the name?

Gertjie: We pulled it out of a hat. We wanted a name that didn't mean something. We wanted a name that has the same feel as the music.

Jacques: 'Cause it sounds like a children's theatre piece.

Who writes the lyrics?

Jacques: I write my own songs and (Gertjie) writes his own songs, and then we come together and make it happen.

Do you eventually see yourself on an international stage?

Jacques: Yes, as you may have noticed, we are Afrikaners, but we don't make Afrikaans music and we sing in English for that reason - so we can go international.

Gertjie: We definitely want to go overseas, but first we want to conquer South Africa.

If you could describe the band in three words?

Gertjie: Theatrical, ballady, groove.

Can you share a craziest moment on stage or band experience?

Jacques: Well something funny happened at the Blues Meets Rock festival. It was late at night and I was playing guitar, and I thought I could do a back-roll while playing. But I'd never tried it before and I ended up lying on my back on stage trying to get up like a stuck tortoise. I don't know, we try to stay sober on stage so we don't do anything too crazy ...

Gertjie: We try to be professional.

Besides music, do you guys have any interesting or unusual hobbies?

Jacques: We love pogo sticking, but we broke our pogo sticks.

Gertjie: I do puppetry for children and old people.

If you could be any animal, what would you be and why?

Gertjie: I would be an eagle because then I could fly.

Jacques: Hmm, that's difficult, 'cause every animal has a down side.

Gertjie: Yeah, 'cause if you are an eagle you don't have hands.

Jacques: Maybe I will be a sloth; hang around the trees and eagles actually catch them.

Future plans?

Gertjie: 'Cause of the album, we are doing lots of shows. Then we're going to KKNK, then after that, working on a theatre piece.

Jacques: And then there are still a couple of music videos coming out for the new album and then we would like to do a live DVD.

Gertjie: Since the beginning it's been an organic growing process, so we are just keeping doing that - taking it further.

Catch MCATJ at their album launch this Friday, 18 March at 7:30pm at the Free World Design Centre, 71 Waterkant Street.

www.mrcatandthejackal.com

Photo by Bruce Geils

ABOUT RUTH COOPER

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