

It's their party, and you" cry if you miss it - The BeatGirls are coming to Taranaki

It's their party and it's going to be a great one, says The BeatGirls co-founder, Andrea Sanders. The BeatGirls are headed to Taranaki to sing and dance up a storm in their show, It's My party, as part of the Right Royal Cabaret Fest at the end of this month. The ongoing popularity of the legendary all female group means they have just notched up an impressive quarter century of performing, and their history with Taranaki is just as long, with the group premiering their show It's My Party in Taranaki as part of the Taranaki Festival of the Arts back in 1999. Ahead of the group bringing a new version of that show back to Taranaki, Stratford Press editor Ilona Hanne chats with Andrea about turning 25, Wikipedia and song lyrics that are best left in the past.

The BeatGirls are celebrating 25 years, that's a pretty impressive number of years, why do you think audiences still love your shows?

Twenty-five years does sound a long time doesn't it? We're not as old as Keith Richards though, so we're still young compared to some. What's the appeal of The Beat Girls? I wonder that myself sometimes, when you consider, we are a covers group in a country with a relatively small population. We have sustained a lengthy and successful career which is no mean feat, and I am really proud of this. We are only here because of the public who support us.

I think one of the things is that we don't take ourselves too seriously, we bring a lot of energy to all our shows, we have a lot of fun, and we make sure the audience do too.

We have also evolved constantly over the years incorporating new styles and costumes.

So when you premiered It's My party in Taranaki, in Hāwera in fact, back in 1999, did you think you would still be partying like it's 1999 all these years later?

No! That show was really back in the early days of The BeatGirls. In 1996, just a few years before we had been just starting out, we had a full band and used to do three hours starting at 10pm in a bar in Courtenay Place in Wellington, I think we got paid about \$80 each for that. We were just doing it for fun, then the bar got busy, we started getting these corporate bookings and it went from there. It's gone really quickly though, it doesn't feel that long ago we were putting on that show for the first time.

The BeatGirls have had a connection with the Taranaki Arts festival for many years now, and you perform at other arts festivals around the country, and overseas, but you also do a lot of performing at much less high-brow events, fundraisers, weddings and so on. Do you have a preference.

I certainly really like doing the arts festivals, and definitely get a big kick when we are invited to perform at something where the headline act might be Dave Dobbyn or Hollie Smith, but some of the best gigs we've had have been in rural towns at small events completely off the beaten track. We've been coming to Taranaki since the first arts festival I think and always love it. Sometimes it's a little intimidating being part of an "arts festival", there can be a lot of high art on the programme, and what we do is well, not rocket science. It's heavyweight light entertainment, I just made that phrase up. We also perform great songs with choreography, audience interaction, a bit of immature humour, okay, a lot of that, and have fun, and I think people really relate to that and are there to have a good time.

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It's not just nationally you've performed, The BeatGirls have also extensively performed overseas. I read on Wikipedia you were featured on The Today Show while you were in Greece - how did that come about?

Are we on Wikipedia? I need to check that out, I didn't know! Yes, we were in Sydney performing at an Olympics party, and then we were invited to perform in Athens at the Athens Olympics, while we were there, they were filming a segment for The Today Show with Katie Couric and they asked us if we wanted to be on it. Of course we did! After that, we got more invites to perform at fundraisers and events in the USA. It's great going there, we always hit up the costume shops in Los Angeles when we go over.

Wikipedia has actually given me lots of information on you - it says you featured in a love scene with Kate Winslet in a movie - is that true or is it false news?

Yes, I was cast as Diello in Heavenly Creatures, the Peter Jackson movie. My character was this figurine that came to life and went around murdering people, which was fun! I was practically glued into this latex suit for it, so yes I did roll around on a bed with Kate Winslet, but you would have had no idea it was me under that latex. A few of The BeatGirls have worked with Peter Jackson over the years, a couple of them are foley artists (creating sounds for films, replicating live sound) when they aren't touring with The BeatGirls.

Back to It's My party, which is less latex and more fun, vibrant costumes. What inspired the show?

The 1999 show which premiered in Taranaki was based on the lyrics of songs of those girl groups in the 60s, and really the girls were always the victims in the story, and we just wanted to have a look at that, but in a fun way. Then in the second half we look at the more empowering music from then, things like "These Boots were made for walking".

Some of those lyrics are pretty outdated now, are there any that stand out as particularly bad?

Yes, there is a song that Phil Spector was involved in, "He hit me and it felt like a kiss". We didn't actually joke about that one on stage, we did it with spooky lighting and let the words just hit home. However the show we are bringing to Taranaki has the same title as the one in 1999 but has evolved considerably, it's more about the fact we are having a 25th birthday party.

So are the lyrics in today's music any better?

No, not really. The music videos make it worse now in fact sometimes, even really strong females like Beyonce, in their videos they are lying on the floor, wearing slinky, tight outfits, it's all pretty sexualised now. The girl groups of the 60s were very "proper" and innocent andfully clothed!

Bad lyrics, and downright creepy ones aside, what can audiences expect from this show?

To be entertained and to have fun. It's a mixture of music from 60s girls groups and female artists through the ages, some Motown, also 70s and 80s. We've also got stuff from Amy Winehouse, she was an interesting character herself, she was inspired by The Ronettes, her whole look was modelled on that, she was a 21st century artist influenced by the 60s. The whole show is us doing what we love doing, we are singing songs, telling a few stories about them and having fun.