



Stomp

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STOMP's first tour of Australia transformed them from a fringe show to a big sensation. Years later they're back, with the show that has been large enough to take on up to six versions of itself and tour big theatres constantly. One of the rhythmically dynamic duo, Steve McNicholas, talks to Beat about how Luke Cresswell and himself keep audience's pulses stomping over all these years.

STOMP was created by McNicholas and Cresswell in 1991. Having busked, made soundtracks, bands and video shorts together over several years, they decided to dedicate money they earned in commercial jingle writing to create a whole show. "Our vision was to create a show we would want to see ourselves," says McNicholas down the phone from the UK. "We'd been in shows and were always fishing for a hit single... so this was something we could put all our experience into – of performing on the streets, cabaret, my background in theatre..."

They put their ears together with no idea that they were in the process of making an internationally renowned percussive comedy show that

would still be touring strongly in 2006 with as much enthusiasm and zest from producers and performers. Remembering their first Australian tour, a year after creating the piece, McNicholas says, "we left Sydney and something happened between those last shows and arriving in Adelaide. The word was out. By the time we opened at the Adelaide Fringe, everyone was going crazy about the show. It was incredible." They won the Adelaide Best of the Fringe award, then toured to Montreal Comedy Festival, London's Royal Court Theatre and at the Barcelona Olympic, Galway, Aarhus and Belfast Festivals. They've pretty much been touring ever since, with several casts. It's not a been-there-done-that attitude that McNicholas carries at all, but a bright, clear, positive tone that's open and interested.

If you haven't already seen them live, you might at least be familiar with the Bins commercial for Heineken Lager, a funky, percussive bin number. The piece was originally written and choreographed by Luke as part of the band's stage show: it proved to be the starting point for STOMP's climactic dustbin dance.

It's a dustpan and broom orchestra that the show presents. Why's it been so successful? The quality of the choreography and performers, the simplicity of the theatrical framework and the inclusion of the audience. It's somewhat skit based with no direct plot but quite universal stories through rhythms. I remember seeing the show in London with a business dynamo friend who'd been living on stress and adrenaline for several months and she nearly wept with relief and recognition over the train scene with one character out of sync with everyone else. After that, she sunk into the show and I hadn't seen her so relaxed since over several martinis when I'd arrived in London several weeks earlier. But this was a natural release. STOMP uses rhythms as metaphors for the simplest and most complex of life's moments without ever taking itself too seriously.

While the company has expanded, the creators still make sure their presence is direct. "We audition for all castings still," says McNicholas. "Each show has its own rehearsal director but we still go out and visit the tours and make sure the quality is up. At the moment, all the companies are really great." As far as letting each show have its own qualities, McNicholas says "the personality of the show changes dramatically but the music and choreography stay the same. Basically, we can take one person and replace them with someone from another show. They are interchangeable but still have their own character."

While McNicholas is in more of a production role now, he has recently

been picking up the musical saw, he admits. And it is good to hear that the boys are not restricted to garbage for rhythms. Released early next year will be a film about sardines, shot in South Africa. As to what sounds the sardines are making in the minds of Cresswell and McNicholas, it will be very intriguing to discover. Perhaps it will inspire another hit show. Splash?

STOMP is on at Her Majesty's Theatre from Tuesday May 30-Sunday June 4. Bookings: Ticketek 132 849.