



Ex-pat Kiwis Steph Brown and Deva Mahal form the core of Fredericks Brown, a New York based group that recently returned home for some live shows.

by Sarah Illingworth

Steph Brown moved to New York in 2007 to complete a degree in jazz and contemporary music at the renowned New School. Having gigged with the likes of Opensouls, Che Fu and Hollie Smith for years prior, the keys player had already cut her chops at home, and it didn't take long for her to hook up with fellow ex-pat, the super-talented Deva Mahal - who had also relocated to NYC - to form Afrobeat inspired rnb/soul act Fredericks Brown.

Having recorded their debut EP *Out Of The Rain* this past US summer with another ex-pat - producer and jazz guitarist Aaron Nevezie - Fredericks Brown have

I think the first day that we met we went back to her place - she had this apartment in the Lower East Side - and we started playing. We wrote a song that night, and it was really cool, because it was a writing connection that I hadn't had with anyone else up until then. We just write really well together.

So it was pretty soon after you moved to New York that you started playing together?

Yeah, we used to go and jam - every Thursday they have a house band at the Rose Bar in Williamsburg, and when I met Deva she'd been playing there so I used to go as well. For a while we were playing with that house band but it wasn't quite... I guess we were still finding our sound as well, but it didn't gel. And then for a while we played just as a duo, that was fun. Then we found other people, and just tried a bunch of different things. Mike [Taylor, guitarist] started playing with us on trumpet. He's a trumpet player first, before guitar, and he's bad ass

we needed a guitarist, and Mike said he could play guitar - he's great.

Who's your drummer?

We've been through a bunch of drummers. It was funny because there were a few drummers that came over from New Zealand, like Myele Manzanza from Wellington, he plays in Electric Wire Hustle - he came to New York for three months, right when we needed a drummer. He was great [and] he came on tour when we opened for Taj [Mahal], Deva's dad. He brought this more Afrocentric vibe to our music, which was just what [we] needed at the time. He was great, and then he left and then another fantastic drummer - Darren Mathieson who's from Wellington and plays with everybody, he's just killer - he came over straight after.

Perfect timing.

It really was, he was a godsend. He ended up recording with us for the [*Out Of The Rain*] EP. He's just

and he's got a nice feel. He listens to a lot of old rhythm and blues, and so he's got that in his playing. He's currently our drummer, and hopefully we'll keep him.

How did you feel about playing as Fredericks Brown in New Zealand?

I guess I [was] nervous - it's the first time I've played my own music in New Zealand, my own compositions, so that's always a little bit scary, you know? And secondly I'm proud of what we made, so I figure I hoped people like it. I feel it's the best that we can come with, what we have now. This time around we [were] really just trying to introduce ourselves, 'cause we've never really played in New Zealand [before] and this is our first EP. They've been playing our first song ['What Lies Within'] on radio quite a lot, just trying to get our name out there. It's kind of weird - it's not really starting from scratch because a lot of people know who Deva is, and I guess in



finally found their groove, and it's pretty shit hot. They've played many a gig in New York and around the US since starting out, but this summer they tripped down home to play their first ever New Zealand shows - with Steph sticking around through February to also gig in a solo capacity as Lips. I caught up with her in the Lower East Side.

How did you and Deva start playing together?

I met Deva in New Zealand, but I didn't know her very well - she was living in Wellington and I was from Auckland, so I'd see her every now and then, just at festivals and stuff. But when I moved to New York I looked her up.

- he's really, really good. He started playing with us when we had a big band, we had like five people, plus horns, plus occasional backing vocalists - which kind of fell apart because we couldn't pay anyone.

You'll get two bucks each!

Yeah, pretty much. That was balls.

Sounds like fun though.

It was a lot of fun - it was heaps of fun, but money definitely became a factor pretty quickly. After a while we were like, 'alright, we need to think about this.' So we basically ditched everyone and then I started playing bass on the keyboards, because that was easier. So we just had drums, me and Deva, and then

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such a great drummer, and he was able to tie up a lot of the rhythmic ideas of the songs, and give them a structure - yeah, [we're] forever grateful. Currently we're using a young kid called Jeff Barton. He's from South Carolina - or maybe North [laughs]. He's really cool

Auckland [we] can use the people I used to play with - but it is still like we're a new band.

It's kind of weird to have played less in New Zealand than here.

Yeah - it's weird. Hopefully people liked it [laughs].

Out Of The Rain is out now.✖

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