



The rock star curator

BRIAN RITCHIE, MUSICIAN FROM ALTERNATIVE ROCK BAND VIOLENT FEMMES, ORGANISES THE MUSEUM OF OLD AND NEW ART'S MONA FOMA FESTIVAL IN TASMANIA, AUSTRALIA. HERE'S HOW A BASS PLAYER BECOMES A CURATOR

WORDS | GISELLE WHITEAKER

What's so good about being in a band?

Violent Femmes drummer Victor DeLorenzo told me, "You can't go out and drink with a drum machine." Millions of musicians have tried to play together and the chemistry is something to wonder at. Sometimes you see losers grouping together, but by pooling intellectual resources they come up with something amazing.

You're a part-time musician and a part-time event curator. How do you manage both?

I am a full-time musician and a full-time curator. That means I work hard and put in long hours. I have musical strategies for dealing with the time deficit, such as playing a lot of improvised music, and having modular line-ups for various bands. Using notation also cuts down on the time crunch.

Where did MONA FOMA come from?

Salamanca Arts Centre asked me to devise a plan for an art and music festival. I wasn't interested in becoming an organiser but did it as an intellectual exercise. They took that concept to MONA for sponsorship and it became MONA FOMA.

When you determine the line up, do you wonder if you're making the right choices?

There is quite a bit of meditation that goes into the process, but if I follow my instincts it's usually a good decision. I don't like to over-think the process. It's organic.

What's the quirkiest act you've chosen?

Tina Havelock Stevens did her "White Drummer" underwater drumming stunt for us: playing drums in a cage submerged in the Derwent River. Considering this is the most extreme thing any drummer has done, we were proud to present it.

Where do you find the acts?

Some artistic directors scour the globe. I look on YouTube. I'd rather spend the money on the artist than on my travels. However, I travel extensively as my alter-ego [rock star] so I find artists that way. Artists recommend others. And a lot of them find me on Facebook. I've also found a number playing on the street.

Describe MONA FOMA in two sentences...

MOFO is a music festival based on creativity and uniqueness, not commercialism.

Who comes to the festival?

We target a general audience because Tasmania is small. That's not to say we pander to them. On the contrary. We take sophisticated or unusual programming and market it as if it's user friendly. We invite people to participate in the festival, rather than being consumers. Our demographic ranges from two years of age to ninety.

What other festivals do you go to?

I go to festivals that invite me to play. Most recent was Coachella in California with Violent Femmes, and then Byron Bay Blues & Roots with Rodriguez and The Break. I don't go to festivals to check them out. I'm not interested, because I don't want to be influenced.

Any hints on who might make their way into MOFO in 2014?

No. Hahahahaha!

Dark MOFO is on as we speak. How's it working out?

It's large-scale public art like never seen before in Tasmania. That is exciting. It's really brightening up our winter. 🌞