

A SUMPTUOUS FEAST

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Take a bunch of crazy fiddlers, add in some of the best musicians in the country, and you've got a recipe for — well, a musical feast. In this case, the FIDDLERS FEAST.

The Fiddlers Feast is the latest incarnation of the Fiddlers' Festival, a moveable smorgasbord of players which first began its life at the 2006 Tamworth Festival. The band has now evolved into an international sensation, performing at festivals in Japan, Europe, Hong Kong and of course all over Australia.

And it's that international aspect of the group that has led to its name change, according to the man behind the whole concept, Marcus Holden.

"When we started going overseas, we soon realised the name Fiddlers Festival was confusing people. After all, there are fiddlers' festivals all over the world, and our band name no longer worked in that context," Marcus said.

"Besides, the word 'Feast' conjures up all kinds of wonderful images — delicious, indulgent, extravagant things that suit us perfectly."

To celebrate their new name, and their more or less permanent lineup — which has consolidated over the past couple of years — the Fiddlers Feast has also released a brand new album, *Frenzee*, which showcases the extraordinary talents of this bunch of zany, brilliant players.

Frenzee also reveals some prodigious songwriting talent amongst them, with tracks written by Marcus, Clare O'Meara, Garry Steel, Mark Oats and George Washingmachine.

The core members of the Fiddlers Feast are Marcus Holden, Mark Oats and Clare O'Meara on fiddle, with Garry Steel weaving his magic on accordion, John Coker on bass and Rodney Ford on drums.

"The new rhythm section, which really came together in Tamworth this year, has enabled us to really move forward, and evolve as a band," Marcus said.

"We also have frequent guest appearances from Andrew Clermont, when he's in the country, and from George Washingmachine, but they're both incredibly busy — come to that, so is everyone in this band!"

Indeed, the Fiddlers Feast crew are amongst the most in-demand musicians in Australian music (Irish, folk and rock, as well as country). But the group members are all thrilled both with the new album, and with the Fiddlers Feast's rapidly growing international profile.

They've just returned from a week in Japan, where they performed at the inaugural Japan Fiddle Festival in Osaka, and earlier in the year they performed for 700,000 people at a special Australian-themed Festival Inter Celtique in Brittany, France. JOHN WILLIAMSON and WARREN FAHEY were also guests at the festival.

Frenzee reflects the diverse musical influences and amazing energy of this unique band, with an eclectic mix of original tracks, fresh takes on classics, and even some impressive vocals from Clare.

"Clare has emerged as a wonderful singer. She has a very distinct style, which suits this music perfectly," Marcus said.

One example is the NINA SIMONE classic *My Baby Just Cares for Me*, while a quirky version of the MEN AT WORK song *Down Under* (with some additions) is another. This song was put together last time the band toured Japan.

Clare's songwriting is also very much in evidence on the album. She penned several superb tracks for *Frenzee*, including *Arachnareelia* (inspired by her experiences of sharing a house with numerous spiders), *Stompsville* — a reaction to a grumpy child on a wet day — and *Split The Difference*.

Marcus's most notable contribution to *Frenzee* is arguably his bizarre arrangement of the Mozart classic *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, which has now become *Eine Kleine Nutmusik*.

Marcus refers to it as a "decomposition", and it has to be heard to be believed.

He also wrote the two-part *Tinker's Way*, which is a wonderfully evocative composition, as well as *Talk To Tony* (penned with Garry Steel, Mark Oats and George Washingmachine), the catchy *Catgut Strut* and *Get Stuff*, eventually named by his wife Robyn.

In addition, the album features several superb versions of other songs. Amongst the highlights are *Rocket Pilots*, the beautiful jazz piece *How High the Moon* (also featuring Clare on vocals), and a song that's almost become the Fiddlers Feast theme, *Holiday for Strings*.

Frenzee is a superbly crafted, brilliantly performed and energy-packed album that captures everything that makes the Fiddlers Feast such a special group — and one which is sure to continue taking the world by storm over the next few years.