

# Exploring *Form and Function Part Two* with Gangs of Ballet

 By Pasqua Heard

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Much like their captivating live performances, sitting across from the MTV MAMA Award winning band, Gangs of Ballet, was both energising and thought-provoking. The trio, namely Brad Klynsmith, Josh Klynsmith and Jono Rich, lead me into the realm of the South African music industry and discussed their refreshingly authentic approach to their latest EP *Form and Function Part 2*, the second in the Form and Function trilogy.



Jono Rich, Josh Klynsmith and Brad Klynsmith. Photographer: © Craig Scott

The band started as a side project in Durban, but soon went mainstream with the release of its first single *Breaking the Silence* back in 2011. Known to experiment with a mix of alternative, melodic, anthemic, electronic and dance music, the five times SAMA nominated band is a highly recommended act to witness live. Since the band is currently on tour, fans in Cape Town can catch the band at Cafe Roux in Noordhoek tonight (Friday 11 November). Here's what they have to say about their work...

## ■ Congratulations on your recent release of *Form and Function Part 2*. What inspired you to self-produce the EP?

[Brad] The self-production in our hometown is one of the most homegrown of our recordings that we've done in a long time. I think that you can feel the energy around the sound, that's different to part one. I think we're getting more and more honest with our music. Some of it isn't so much insight into Gangs, but the spirit of it is, whereas other songs like *Follow*, *Life Goes On* and *The Wind* are fairly telling, honest songs. I hope we get more and more honest about where we are in life. It's vulnerable though. 80% of people like beats, but when the 20% ask you about your lyrics, you find yourself in a vulnerable position.

[Josh] When we wrote our first EP back in 2011, we weren't trying to get on radio. We just wrote songs which we thought were cool. Then that got on radio and, the next minute, this was our livelihood.

As much as you don't want people's opinion to affect you, it does. There's an expectation that you need to get something on air, so that you can carry on with your career. I think with this last EP, this is now becoming less and less of a thing for us. Not that we hate what we originally brought out, but some of that was definitely prescribed. That's why we produced this new album ourselves. If it gets on radio, that's great!



■ **What is the meaning behind the lyrics in *Form and Function Part 2*?**

[Brad] It's song dependent, but I think they're telling of where our headspace has been. It's been a challenging last year for Gangs. We've really had to try push through a little bit. It's been an emotional year trying to succeed, while facing highlights and lowlights. For example, while Life Goes On is an obvious lyric, at the end of the song it's big and bold and chaotic, so that's showing that life can't really be pinned down.

However, the tone of the album is actually quite light. We feel lighter now than we did a year ago. It's been a year of shedding.

■ **Tell us about your songwriting process.**

[Brad] Josh and I are basically the songwriters, but I do say that lightly, as we are the initial concept creators, but then whatever comes out as Gangs is very much a team effort. I'd say almost all the songs we've written are 50/50 Josh and I. We then take that to the band room and get the actual Gangs' sound. It's interesting, if you add or subtract a person from the creation pool, the whole sound changes.

■ **Following on from my previous question, when or where do you have your best song ideas?**

[Josh] I don't listen to radio when I drive, so I'll often have ideas while I'm driving.

Sometimes I'll have ideas in the surf. Now that's an annoying one, because you can't record it anywhere. For one of the songs on this new EP Something, I had an idea just as I was paddling out for a surf with Brad. I was stuck with it and found myself literally singing this in my head for two hours. Eventually, I ran back to my car and put it on my phone!



© Craig Scott

■ **You mention you don't listen to radio, what do you guys feel about radio in SA?**

[Jono] A lot of what radio used to be isn't anymore. It's become pretty prescribed now. Back in the day, your typical radio DJ would choose songs that they'd enjoy, and it was an extension of their radio personality.

But radio today is also giving birth to a lot of people doing their own online stations. So, I think it'd be interesting to see where things head and I think especially with everyone making their own playlists, it's going to catch on pretty soon and oke's are going to start catering to their audience.

■ **To what extent is your music influenced by your fans' requests?**

[Brad] I don't think we pander to fans. I think we've lost a lot of fans and gained a lot of fans, because people change. I'm fans of bands, but don't listen to their latest album, because I don't enjoy it.

[Jono] A small part of your mind thinks "I hope people like this", but this isn't the driving force behind what you're making. You make what you enjoy and what you are into.

■ **What bands inspire you currently?**

[Jono] Tame Impalas' latest album has some really nice synth sounds. In fact, in our latest album, I was trying to reference a lot of late 80s synth sounds, too.

**Navigating the SA music industry**

■ **What would you say is the greatest opportunity being SA artists? Likewise, what's the greatest challenge?**

[Brad] I find the greatest opportunity is that, because it's a smaller industry, you have access to more significant players in the industry - things like radio play, labels, festivals, promoters, etc. You don't have that elite vibe where you need to go through various networks to speak to the 'big dog'. If you're willing to do a bit of work, you can accelerate your growth fairly quickly. The other pro is that smaller bands get to play to big crowds almost from inception. South Africa has an amazing festival culture with a minimum of 5,000 at shows and up.

Equally, there's a glass ceiling. Our industry probably fits into one of the genres in the States. You can only have so many fans in South Africa and our genre is a thin slice in a very small pie and of that genre, that's split between a couple of players, so your market share is tiny.

[Josh] The industry has also changed radically since we started. There's a lot of guys coming through now who are getting a lot of radio play, but not a lot of shows. Bands can't start like we started in Durban. But a lot of shows are in Joburg and Cape Town. I would be interested to see who the next band is that will be able to live off being a band. If you want to be a full time band, you have to be in for serious graft.

We're in a fortunate position where we launched ourselves five years ago and have that many years hard work behind us.

### ▣ Name three ways how bands can progress and stay relevant.

- Keep writing good songs and stick to basic principles. Don't write stuff that won't get playlisted.
- People want to listen to songs that they can remember, so sound choice is vital.
- Keep a pulse on social. One of our music videos [*Something*] just dropped and received amazing attention. I'm not saying we get social media right, but social media is huge and as important as music now.

Watch the music video for *Something* from *Form and Function Part Two* here:

### ▣ Finally, apart from music, what other talents do you guys have?

[Brad] I surf a lot - if I could choose to be a professional surfer or professional musician, I'd choose to be a professional surfer, but I'm not good enough to do that, so I have to do music. But I LOVE surfing.

[Jono] I used to be really good at spinning tops when I was younger - but that was primary school, hey. I also like designing and reimagining spaces, e.g. Shopfitting.

[Josh] I also like surfing and I love gaming - I'm actually such a nerd! But it's mostly just music.

### Gangs of Ballet tour dates

11 November - Cafe Roux, Cape Town

12 November - Aandklas, Stellenbosch

13 November - V&A Waterfront, Cape Town

19 November - Sundowners, Johannesburg

25 November - River Town Shed, Durban

10 December - 5FM Live Loud, Johannesburg

*Form and Function Part Two* is available on [iTunes](#)

[Facebook page](#) | [Instagram](#) | [@GangsOfBallet](#)

## ABOUT PASQUA HEARD

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