

Mango Groove celebrates 40 years of musical brilliance at Galaxy KDay!

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Get ready to celebrate a monumental moment in music history as Mango Groove, the legendary 11-piece Afropop band, commemorates 40 years of musical excellence at the upcoming Galaxy KDay family music festival.



Galaxy KDay, Presented by Galaxy AI on the S24 and Kfm 94.5, will take place at Meerendal Estate on Saturday, 2 March.

Renowned for their unique fusion of pop and township music, including marabi and kwela influences, Mango Groove has left an indelible mark on the South African music scene since their inception in Johannesburg in 1984. The band's journey began when three of the four founding members – John Leyden, Andy Craggs, and Bertrand Mouton – were bandmates in a "white middle-class punk band" called Pett Frog, during their time as students at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Since their formation, Mango Groove has released six studio albums and numerous singles, captivating audiences with their infectious rhythms and uplifting melodies.

In an exclusive interview, Mango Groove's lead singer, Claire Johnston, delves into the band's evolution since the eighties, shares top career highlights, and offers insights into the band's future direction.

- **How has the band evolved over the past 40 years, and what changes have occurred among the original members?**

In a strange way, for all our experiences, Mango Groove has stayed pretty much true to the founding ideas and spirit of the early years. Collaboration, eclecticism, that harnessing of uniquely South African urban styles, combined with contemporary pop. More than anything: celebration! The celebration of inclusion, tolerance and diversity.

Sure, we have "evolved" in terms of reach and touring and technology, but at the core of it, Mango Groove is pretty much the same creature, with the same (to use a great South African word) "Gees".

In terms of line-up changes, of course there have been many, given the passage of time, and given that we lost a couple of the family through the years. In part, this has always been part of the spirit and ethos.

We also joke that, through the decades, Mango has been a sort of Barnardo's Home for lost and transient musicians, lol. So many great SA artists have been part of the line-up, or have passed through on their way to great things, and we have been so privileged to have collaborated and shared the stage with so many iconic performers through the years.

Again, though, that central, beating heart of Mango Groove is thrumming away stronger than ever, and the key performers, going right back to the founders, the front line and the writers, remain very much the same.

- **Can you recount the band's humble beginnings and your first performances? Can you share it with us?**

Student gigs, unpaid protest shows, and smoky clubs were how we started building something of a cult following. It was a very different South Africa back then, and being a non-racial band had its own challenges.

At the same time, there was a strong sense of change and destiny in the air, so they were fraught, heady, and yet wondrous times indeed. A favourite venue was Jameson's in Commissioner Street in central Johannesburg which was a real melting pot of South Africans, and a place where some amazing music was born. Looking back, it was an incredible time to be alive.

- **Is it true that the band's name originated over dinner, as a playful pun on the phrase "Man, go groove!"?**

That's exactly right! Okay, it may have been a lunch and not a dinner, but yes, the idea was to find a name that evoked a sense of fun and tropical fruitiness (along with the sexist pun!), not realising that it would last as long as it has.



- **Claire Johnston, what were your first experiences performing with Mango Groove like? (You were only 17, right?)**

I was indeed 17 and still at school, and quite overwhelmed to be performing with such remarkable musicians: for instance, Mickey Vilikazi was 64 at the time and had served in the Entertainment Corp in World War Two, so he brought this wealth of experience with him. At my first rehearsal there was no microphone, so the band only heard me sing properly at the actual gig.

I was the only girl in the band back then which was also a bit intimidating. At the same time, though, I really did have a sense of joining a family, and of amazing things ahead.

My first, official gig with Mango was at a garden show in Rosebank, at a venue – long since gone – called The Hot Tin Roof. I was a nervous wreck, but the show went amazingly, and as they say: the rest is history.

- **What are the top three highlights of Mango Groove's career over the past four decades?**

There are so, so many but an immediate standout would definitely be the 1994 Inauguration of President Mandela. It was a time of so much hope where South Africa was finally a part of the world again and the concert was satellite-linked around the globe. Another epic show was the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to China – again, an event that was more than music with the world's media all gathered for the momentous occasion.

Tough to pick a third, but perhaps our performance at the legendary Montreux Jazz Festival which was presented by the great Quincy Jones where we were called back for three encores!

- **After making your debut on the KDay stage in 2020, how does it feel to return this year, and what can festival goers expect from your performance?**

KDay 2020 was a very special experience for us and it's a genuine thrill to be back four years later, celebrating our 40th anniversary. Kfm has been amazingly supportive to us through the years, and we are truly grateful for that.

We plan on bringing 11-person high energy fun, tinged with nostalgia, where we are hoping everyone will sing and dance until they drop!

- **How has the world changed from Mango Groove's perspective over the last 40 years, and what observations can you share about the advancements in society and technology?**

It's been an astonishing shift which has taken some getting used to, especially perhaps the social media aspect of it all.

In terms of recording technology, it has been liberating, quite frankly as one has so much more freedom to give expression to one's creative ideas and disseminate them.

In terms of how the world feels right now, well, for all the things to celebrate, there are also so many strange crosscurrents and dissonant dynamics, aren't there? Issues around environment, identity, culture, belonging... Now more than ever, I feel all people need to celebrate their similarities over their possible differences, and to look at how we bring each other together, rather than looking for reasons to divide us along arbitrary lines.

Music has always played a powerful role in bringing people together, and I think now we need to look at those positive parts of the human experience and to celebrate what unites us, what includes us and what pushes us forward to bigger, kinder things.

If Mango has played a tiny part in this process through the years, it is something we are truly grateful for. Quoting one of my favourite Mango songs: "After all is said and done, we turn our faces to the sun".

- **This year we enter a new era of mobile AI as Samsung introduces the Galaxy S24 Series. With this in mind, how much has technology changed from the band's perspective over 40 years. How did you communicate over the years, in contrast to today?**

Technology has pretty much redefined the whole world, hasn't it? And our industry is no different.

From recording and video technology through to social media, through to live production, all aspects of it have dramatically liberated artists. Speed, choice, expression, freedom... the possibilities are endless.

In terms of how we used to communicate, of course this was slower, and truth be told we are still getting our heads around the true power of social media and the internet.

Music and art have always been about what moves you, and in this sense, nothing has changed. The best art today should still have this quality, and technology is not there to replace this: it is there to liberate it, highlight it and give it greater reach.

- **Looking ahead, what does the future hold for Mango Groove, and are there any upcoming projects or collaborations on the horizon?**

Gosh, for all the milestones and the decades that have passed, we really do feel that the best years still lie ahead for us. As a concert band, I honestly believe Mango is better today than it has ever been, as we are so comfortable in our own skins now, and we are pretty much both friends and family simultaneously.

Projects in the pipeline? Touring, recording, collaborations and various legacy projects, including a full-length movie documentary, a huge stage musical, pre-production on a dramatised TV series, and development on a movie musical.

Don't miss out on Mango Groove's milestone celebration at Galaxy KDay! It promises to be a momentous occasion, highlighting the enduring power of music to unite generations and inspire joy.

They will be joined on stage by top musicians like Zakes Bantwini, Lloyiso and Mi Casa, alongside other renowned artists including Youngsta CPT, Emo Adams, Kurt Darren, Early B, Jeremy Loops, and Shekhinah.

Tickets are selling out fast so book yours now at [Ticketpro](#). #GalaxyKDay

Galaxy KDay ticket prices:

General access (13+) R380

Chill Zone (18+) R700

Meerendal Experience R600

Kids (2 to 12 years old) R160

Galaxy KDay artist line-up:

- Zakes Bantwini
- Lloyiso
- Kurt Darren
- Mango Groove
- Jeremy Loops
- Mi Casa
- Youngsta CPT
- Emo Adams
- Early B
- Sun El-Musician
- Shekhinah

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