

Connan Mockasin

Start time: 8pm

Running time: 105 minutes – including interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change

Martin Aston talks to Connan about creating new worlds through his conceptual music.

'I like creating something relaxing to watch and to listen to,' says Connan Mockasin. 'Something atmospheric. Another world to pop into for a while.'

By atmospheric, perhaps the New Zealander means a beguiling sense of playfulness, mystery and absurdity, as his Barbican debut illustrates. The show comes in three parts: the opening instalment of a five-part film 'melodrama' (his description) *Bostyn & Dobsyn*, revolving around an ambiguous relationship between a music teacher and his pupil, followed by a live set by Jassbusters – also the title of Mockasin's new album – comprising, 'a band of music teachers' - in truth, Mockasin and his band, bassist Nick Harsant, drummer Matthew Eccles and rhythm guitarist Rory McCarthy. Lastly, said 'teachers' shed their disguise to play, 'all the hits!' he promises, namely selections from preceding albums *Forever Dolphin Love* and *Caramel*.

How to illuminate this maverick world of Mockasin? The man born Connan Hosford in Te Awanga on the east coast of New Zealand's north island, and currently living in Tokyo – isn't much help. 'It's just ideas in my head that I put together and, later, might make more sense,' he vouches. 'But I don't think about the meaning at the time.'

To give an idea of Mockasin's creative process, *Caramel* was written in the wake of imagining an album called *Caramel*. But it's also a semi-concept album. 'It starts with the dolphin [from his debut album] leaving, and the boss who is so in with love with the dolphin is sad, and then it kicks into the new album, and he is happier,' he explains.

If 'why' remains tantalisingly untouchable, at least we can describe 'how'. 'I don't sit down and write songs, I'm too lazy for that,' Mockasin admits. 'I hear something in my head, like I'm day-dreaming, and if I like it enough, I'll write it down. When I feel the whole atmosphere of a cohesive record, I'll make one.'

The impetus for Jassbusters was a series of *Bostyn & Dobsyn* comics ('in their hundreds') and short films, a long-time collaboration between Connan, his two brothers and their former next-door neighbour Blake, who plays Dobsyn to Mockasin's Bostyn in the film. 'The stories are fairly nonsensical, but each has a different scenario, like Bostyn and Dobsyn meet at school or a jazz comedy club. There's always borderline danger but nothing too much happens. It just felt like now was a good time to show them in public.'

Much of New Zealand's astonishing level of musical invention (disproportionate to its population, roughly the size of Madrid) falls under the domain of tenacious, yearning guitar-pop, but not Mockasin. He resonates soul, soft rock and slow jams, a vapoury, gloopy and *very* relaxed fusion stitched around his dreamy, high-pitched voice and exquisite guitar curlicues. Unsurprisingly, he says he is unsure of the provenance of this sound but does say his dad's Jimi Hendrix collection encouraged him to learn guitar, 'I liked Hendrix's relaxed side, less the crazy noises. My other biggest influence was Michael Jackson.'

Other Mockasin pastimes include welding (he particularly enjoys building beach vehicles), surfing, cooking and 'time with friends, drinking wine, chatting...' In other words, relaxation trumps careerism. 'The music industry is so calculated and serious, it sucks the fun and spontaneity out of everything,' he declares, and indeed, his music 'career' seems quite accidental. When his band Connan & The Mockasins (he used to make moccasins out of sheepskin and motorbike tyre) relocated to London in 2006, after two home-made EPs, EMI imprint Regal released a two-track 7" single but Mockasin nixed an album deal: 'record labels said, use this studio, this producer... I knew where that was heading.' Instead, Mockasin headed home, preparing to abandon music, and only made an album because, 'my mum said I should. I didn't expect to release it, I just wanted to make a record for my ears and hers.'

The rechristened Connan Mockasin named his 2008 debut *Please Turn Me Into the Snat*, after a half-snake, half-rat sourced from some private mythology. Two years later, producer Errol Alkan's label Phantasy Sound reissued the album as *Forever Dolphin Love* (after its magnificently meandering ten-minute centrepiece) but ecstatic reviews didn't alter his trajectory. Three years later, *Caramel* was almost entirely made alone in a Tokyo hotel room, and though *Jassbusters* is his first 'band' album, it was recorded live, with lyrics created on the spot, 'and some of the music too. My first idea is always the most mysterious and attractive.'

If Mockasin eschews hard grafting, he has hardly been idle between albums. In 2016, he and collaborator Sam Eastgate made an album as Soft Hair (imagine a sleazy Hall & Oates with a Prince fixation). Mockasin wrote songs for Charlotte Gainsbourg's last two records *Stage Whispers* and *Rest* – quite possibly *Jassbusters* peak 'Charlotte's

barbican

Thong' is related. He has also recorded two forthcoming albums; one with his dad, Ade, and a soundtrack to the surfing documentary *The Rehearsal* with MGMT's Andrew VanWyngarden. But right now, it's time to step into Bostyn, Dobsyn and Jassbusters's world; we hope you have a very relaxing time.

Performers

Connan Mockasin vocals, guitar

Nick Harsant bass

Matthew Eccles drums

Rory McCarthy keys, guitar



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