



Kat & Co.

BLUES IS THE NEW COOL

Kat & Co is a London-based, multi-national band, led by vocalist Kat Pearson from Los Angeles. We caught up with Kat and her Italian guitarist Francesco Accurso as they were completing Kat & Co's latest album, *Blues Is The New Cool*.

Verbals: Darren Weale Visuals: Betty Romani

What is the history of Kat & Co and who is in the band now? You're quite international.

Kat: The idea of Kat & Co was born in 2008/2009 when, looking through the Grammy's nominations, I realised the blues played a minor role at the awards. The genre somehow struggled behind and it occurred to me that something had to be done to revive it. The blues is where my roots are and that is where my delivery has always come from and where my heart is. That's when I decided to move back to London and put the whole thing in motion.

Francesco: My involvement with Kat & Co. started in 2011; it wasn't long before Kat asked me to co-write and produce the first album and I gladly took on the challenge. At present the band consists of Kat on vocals, myself on guitars, Federico Parodi on keys, Nicholas Owsianka on drums and Marco Marzola on bass. Considering all our nationalities, I guess we are quite an international act.

Who writes your songs?

Kat: We mainly write our own material, sometimes we do it together and other times one of us comes up with a song and brings it to the table. We generally give ourselves a lot of creative space and this seems to work.

Francesco: Covers play an important role too, it's really hard to create your own version of a classic but it certainly helps in showcasing your style.

What are your songs about?

Francesco: We generally choose stories of ordinary

metropolitan life, focusing on those issues which best represent the blues in modern society. Every day a new drama unfolds in front of our eyes, from the old man who struggles with the loss of his lifelong partner, to the woman whose busy life interferes with her relationships. People who find refuge in drugs and quick affairs in order to escape their otherwise alienating reality. The material is out there and we try to use a combination of melancholy and humour to tell those stories

You put a lot of effort into filming *New Spleen Blues* from the album *I Kat The Blues* for YouTube. Tell us about the song and the making of the video.

Francesco: This is our very first song and it's an attempt to describe the anti-social aspects of social media. Nowadays people are obsessed with the idea of connecting with others, but somehow we keep our physical interaction to a minimum. We seem more interested in gaining popularity through likes and tweets than by doing things and meeting each other.

Kat: At the time, the news of a young girl found dead in her flat, with her body consumed and melted into her sofa, really hit me. Thousands of virtual friends online, but nobody knew she was gone. And what about her close relatives, how is it possible to be socially active but just in a virtual way? It doesn't feel real.

Francesco: The actual

video has been created by a collective of film makers directed by Federico Parodi. It is a combination of traditional and digital animation techniques, and it also features live footage of the band. Lots of effort has been put into it, from the pre-production stages with early sketches, storyboarding and character design, to the frame by frame hand-drawn animation and 3D backgrounds and props. Just like in the lyrics, the video tries to question the relevance of the blues in a contemporary setting; what it is like to experience alienation in the big city, eventually looking for an unspoiled place where to connect with real people.

Is a bit over 8000 views on YouTube a disappointment?

Francesco: We always knew that without the budget for proper advertising, and without a big fan base, the video would have never circulated as much as we wanted. But artistically we are bound to certain choices, we either express our vision, with the tools at our disposal, or we don't. This is quite a unique achievement, as there are not many animation videos in blues history, and it's out there for people to view it, when and if they want to.

What is the next album called and when will it be out?

Francesco: The idea behind the title comes from a little joke with my kids. They kept saying that dad's music is not cool, and so I produced something that they grew very fond of, and I called it 'Blues Is The New Cool'. At

first it was a bit controversial within the band, for obvious reasons, but in the end we decided to be bold about it and enjoy the irony behind it. Plus we love the blues and I believe it can be played, and produced, in a much more contemporary way.

The album is currently on our website at www.katandco.co.uk and it will soon be available for download on every digital retailer worldwide.

“ **THE BLUES IS WHERE MY ROOTS ARE AND THAT IS WHERE MY DELIVERY HAS ALWAYS COME FROM AND WHERE MY HEART IS.** ”

What makes your sound more contemporary?

Francesco: As a producer, I constantly question the direction my work is taking. How far I can go to push the boundaries of the genre, for example, without alienating our audience, and what elements are perceived as dated, or not contemporary, by the average listener.

Undoubtedly mainstream music tends to be focused more on the melody and the beat, as opposed to solos and complicated interplay, and every sound is sculpted and shaped to fit a sonic purpose.

With that in mind, we worked hard on establishing solid and simple urban grooves and kept the focus of the arrangements on the rhythm section. We then used a lot of instruments from the blues tradition to retain the sound of the genre and we recorded everything in high-resolution, to faithfully capture all the sonic colours

of dobros, pianos, Hammonds, cigar box guitars etc...

How important was it to record the project in hi-res? Are expensive studios needed now that recording gear has become so much more affordable?

Francesco: CDs were first introduced in 1982 and audio quality has only degraded since, with the introduction of MP3s and the need for music portability. Now

technology and new digital formats, like DSD, FLAC and the more recent MQA, give us the opportunity to finally hear the music how it was originally recorded, and I wouldn't like to offer anything less to our listeners.

But just like hi-res gives us more clarity and definition, it also reveals the limitations of the gear we use. Contrary to what one might think, there is a huge difference between microphones, pre-amps, converters and the rest of the tools needed to achieve an industry-standard recording. Equally important is to choose the right space for each instrument, whereas a guitar can be tracked practically anywhere, drums and strings need big spaces and great acoustics.

The latest Kat & Co. album required months of preparation. I had to carefully select gear, choose recording spaces and sometimes source studios and musicians

abroad. The strings in Nobody Dies for Love, for example, were recorded in Brazil at Blues Space Studios; my arrangements were performed by a beautiful quartet from the Sao Paulo Philharmonic Orchestra and recorded by Carlos Sander.

And even more important was to choose the right man to mix, and especially master, the album. I can't stress enough how important is the mastering process - it's what gives the final product its sound - and once again my choice fell on Anthony Lim, whose expertise and musical insight helped me deliver our best album to date.

What does bigger production mean?

Francesco: The traditional way of recording blues and jazz, consists in putting the musicians in a room and catching the best possible representation of their live performance. This preserves the freshness and intuitive elements of improvisation and interplay, while containing studio costs. Bigger productions tend to use the studio more as a creative tool, and the producer usually has a much bigger influence on the shaping of the final product. Songs are often recorded and re-arranged several times before the final takes are selected, and great care is taken in polishing the final masters.

How can blues appeal to the young?

Francesco: In my experience, the really young are generally prone to follow mainstream trends and the blues hasn't seen the light of the charts



for years. I know that virtuosos like Bonamassa are gaining consensus, but we are still far from the time when Clapton was filling up stadiums around the world, and guitar music was pulling crowds of all ages. In my opinion the blues needs to be deconstructed and rebuilt with a slightly different shape, form and sound, and then relaunched. That would create both an interest in the new and the old, and hopefully people will go searching for the roots again. We saw that happening in the 60s, 70s and

80s, but lately the interest in re-styling the genre has failed to take shape, and I am interested in addressing this gap in the market.

How are you connecting with the young other than through music?

Francesco: The obvious answer to that is social media, but the nature of the content posted online needs to specifically target each age group. I also contacted a couple of universities, with the view of organising talks with the students and a few performances.

Do you play in Europe?

Kat: We have been visiting Spain for a couple of years now, and we have an agent in France who is consistently giving us work. We have also been offered work in Italy and the Netherlands and we are working on getting there in 2017.

Where does your music gets the best reception?

Francesco: Our performances are generally well received everywhere, and we noticed a great number of musicians showing up at our concerts in the UK, but it's probably



Continental Europe where the band gets the greatest public response.

How much thought do you put into the look of the band?

Francesco: The imagery of the blues is timeless and never really lost its appeal. Suits, hats, long dresses and feathers are common in its tradition and we like to integrate them in our look.

Kat: This is the entertainment industry; people don't pay for a ticket to see you wearing a pair of jeans and a t-shirt and we work real hard to give them a good show.

How can people discover your music and find out about upcoming events?

Kat: We try to be very active online and use those sites which seem to be more

popular today. YouTube, Soundcloud, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are all great apps which help us connect to our listeners. We also rely on radio and blogs to raise awareness about the band, and the DJs of the Independent Blues Broadcasters Association in particular, are tremendously supportive of our work.

Francesco: Our website is also constantly updated and I invite people to sign up to our mailing list in order to receive news about releases and upcoming events.

And finally, what are your influences and who would you like to influence?

Kat: Tina Turner, Diana Ross and Etta James spring to mind but also Bettye LaVette for her incredible story of endurance and strength.

Francesco: In my case, they are way too many to mention, I just hope our work will encourage others to experiment more with the blues; it is direct, straight to the point and extremely sexy, and I believe it has a lot more to say.

Read more about Kat & Co's music at www.katandco.co.uk and you can see them and their strong and engaging stage shows around the UK and beyond in 2017. 

DISCOGRAPHY

BLUES IS THE NEW COOL - 2016
I KAT THE BLUES - 2013



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