

WOMADelaide
30TH
ANNIVERSARY

SPECIAL
EDITION



The Cat Empire's Felix Riebl and Harry James Angus ahead of their farewell shows; rocking the crowd, right; and WOMADelaide is the last chance for fans to experience the original line-up, below.

Pictures: Jake Nowakowski, Ellie Pinney

BRAVE NEW WORLD

One of Australia's most loved acts uses our best World Music festival to farewell their original line-up ... and chart a new course

Story JANE CORNWELL

It's been some trip. But after two decades' worth of touring and music making – variously involving around 1500 shows, seven studio albums and household name status from Whyalla to Wyoming – the six-piece juggernaut that is The Cat Empire are going out the way they broke in: at WOMADelaide.

“WOMADelaide was the flagship festival for us,” says frontman Felix Riebl, 40, of the iconic global music festival which celebrates its 30th anniversary in Botanic Park next weekend – and which a baby Cat Empire first played (as part of late night club WoZone) in 2003.

“The amazing reaction we got gave us the confidence to keep going.”

The band's forthcoming Sunday night slot will be their seventh WOMADelaide appearance. It is also the last chance for WOMADelaideans to experience the original line-up with trademark blend of earthy horns, cheeky grooves and full-throated choruses, its wild brew of ska, jazz,

funk, indie, rock, hip hop, Latin music and whatever else takes their fancy.

“Before WOMADelaide we were still an underground outfit from Melbourne,” says the ever-affable Riebl, sitting in his home studio in Fitzroy, inner Melbourne – where he crafted a rocking solo EP, 2021's Black Room White Walls, along with brand new Cat Empire tunes Going To Live and Great Beauty during lockdown.

“We were all incredibly curious about music from around the world, so just being there at Botanic Park watching acts like Algerian rocker Rachid Taha and Jamaican guitar legend Ernest Ranglin felt extraordinary, a privilege. You could tell that people were there for the festival and not because of any headliners and I've always felt that the inner drive of The Cat Empire is aligned to the spirit of WOMAD.

“Everything is about celebrating music from all over the planet.”

Riebl was just 17 when he co-founded The Cat Empire with mates including Ollie McGill on keyboards, Harry James Angus