

NIGHT
CRAWLER

HYPNOTIC BRASS
ENSEMBLE

Hypno Therapy

Punters and cabbies rejoice as Jay-Z's favourite brass band do a little pre-gig busking in east London

It's five o'clock in the afternoon and London's Cargo club is playing host to all nine members of Chicago-born, Brooklyn-dwelling Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, their friends, family and children, a substantial backstage crew and some very large instruments. Tonight the event will draw in 800 fans, keen to catch a rare British performance and planned collaboration with Afrobeat legend Tony Allen. Right now, it's chaos. Gabriel Hubert, the trumpeter also known as Hudah, is not fazed. "We're cool," he draws, as journalists and cameramen shift him from one place to the next. "We're free and easy."

That attitude should keep them sane through 2009, which promises to be the biggest year of their decade-long existence. They've already played with Mos Def and Erykah Badu in recent years and call the likes of Kanye West and Jay-Z huge fans. Straight after tonight's show, they're travelling to Paris for yet another gig, before returning to the UK to record with Blur and Gorillaz frontman Damon Albarn. But for now, they've decided to escape the madness of venue preparations, unplug their already-soundchecked instruments and head out into the street for one of the busking sessions that, as much as anything, have helped make their name.

They position themselves against a graffiti-covered red wall underneath one of east London's many railway arches and quickly tune up. Already, the sonorous acoustics begin to warm the freezing winter air, even though it's so cold that some band members are visibly shivering. Their initial notes attract a small crowd, which swells once they launch into the majestic *Satin Sheets*. ("It's the first song we ever wrote together, back in '99," Gabriel explains later.) In five minutes, 30 people have gathered. The band have their eyes tightly closed, moving in perfectly co-ordinated time to the song, which sounds enormous. The arches amplify the

deep bass of the sousaphone and pick out the melodies of the trumpets with perfect clarity. Surprised onlookers take out cameras and phones to capture the moment. Even a cabby, forced to slow to a crawl so as not to hit the band or spectators, stops for a second and dances in his seat, beaming at the sounds he can hear. If this is what five minutes of a last-minute street performance can do, tonight promises to be spectacular.

After enthusiastic applause and a shout-out for the band's website – "You've been listening to Hypnotic Brass Ensemble – that's Hypnotic Brass-dot-net," they yell – the band head inside for a bite to eat and a break from the madness. They gather on the club's leather sofas to talk about tonight's main event. There are pockets of discussion about whether to busk again when there are paying punters in the venue, whether to do it inside the foyer or back out on the street; there are conversations about women, about a lack of vegetarian food, about how they'll work out their collaboration with Allen. Then, one by one, they drift off back to the hotel.

Three hours later and Hypnotic Brass Ensemble are standing outside underneath the same railway arches, only this time they're watching a heaving crowd at the doors of the club. There's pleading over the guestlist and with the bouncers as people jostle to get into tonight's sold-out show, put on by Karen P's Broad Casting and Red Bull Music Academy Radio Presents. Only a handful seem to notice that they're smoking and joking around with Albarn. When the audience are finally inside, they file into the foyer and, against the door of the gents, start to play.

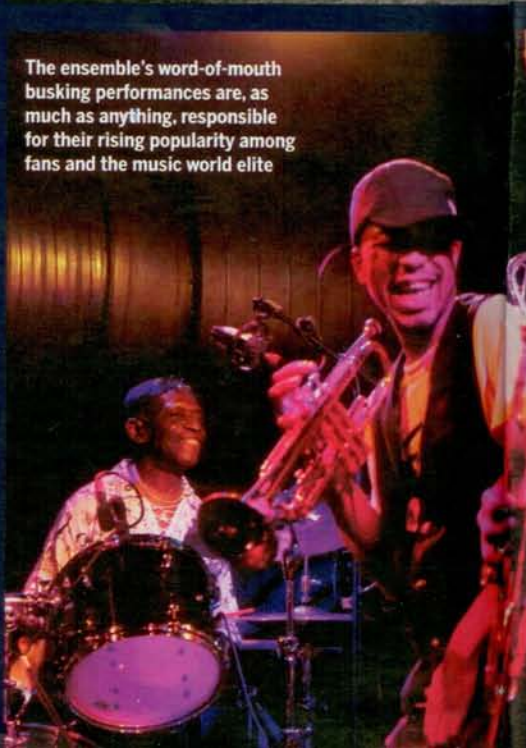
People begin to realise that while they've been waiting for the band to take to the stage, there's a mini-performance happening right here for the lucky few who turned up in time to squeeze themselves into the tiny space, mostly filled by the Brass Ensemble themselves. Magic happens as slack-jawed amazement gives way to ecstatic dancing and cheering. They may only play one song, but it's enough to guarantee the love of the entire audience before they've even taken a bow.

As they disappear backstage, the spectators turn to each other, all grinning like the cabby who passed by earlier in the afternoon. "Did you just see that?" Ahmad Dayes, from London, asks his friend. He's more than impressed. "I've been checking out their stuff on YouTube, but this is even better," he says. "This band are exactly what we need right now." When the Ensemble step out onto the tiny stage, which barely looks like it will hold all nine of them, 800 people whoop and cheer in agreement.

Catch the whole night on Red Bull Music Academy Radio, tune in at redbullmusicacademyradio.com



The ensemble's word-of-mouth busking performances are, as much as anything, responsible for their rising popularity among fans and the music world elite





WORDS: REBECCA NICHOLSON. PHOTOGRAPHY: THOMAS BUTLER

LILY ALLEN

16.03.09

Ms Allen is now on tour and sharing her new album *It's Not Me, It's You* with the masses. *O₂ Arena, Dublin, Ireland*

JOACHIM GARRAUD

20.03.09

The successful French house producer and DJ Joachim Garraud joins top international DJ Laidback Luke to guest-star at the Stargate Club Session. *Volksgarten, Vienna, Austria*

NIGHT OF THE JUMPS

21.03.09 - 22.03.09

The freestyle motocross world championship begins for 2009 with riders performing the death-defying mid-air manoeuvres that give the series its name. *O₂ Arena, Berlin, Germany*

GERD JANSON WITH SOUNDSTREAM

21.03.09

Gerd Janson is one of the hottest talents on the German house music circuit, mixing deep house, garage and disco tracks from a range of decades. *Zukunft, Zurich, Switzerland*

HYPNOTIC BRASS ENSEMBLE

22.03.09

A chance to hear the 'hypnotic' sound of the brass pioneers bringing hip-hop and jazz together. The family group has a growing international following, so arrive early for this chance to see them for free, and at Carnegie Hall. *New York, USA*

SKULL DISCO

SWISS TOUR

26.03.09 - 28.03.09

London Dubstep outfit Skull Disco are performing together for the last time at a former factory in the heart of Geneva. Appleblim, Shackleton and Necta Selecta will deal out the bassheavy beats that have become their signature sound. *Le Zoo, Geneva, Switzerland*

SNOWBOMBING

MAYRHOFEN

29.03.09 - 04.04.09

The 'greatest show on snow' won't disappoint in 2009. Acts braving the cold include Fabio & Grooverider, London Electricity, Scratch Perverts, Zinc, Skream, Benga, Greg Wilson and many more. *Mayrhofen, Austria*