

# Blind Tiger Sessions with Arno Carstens

By [Farah Barry](#)

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"To be able to play - and to play these weird instruments - that's what music is all about." Pithy or not, Arno Carstens knows his music. And, as it happens, he also knows his art. His series of Blind Tiger Sessions - a small part of the larger exhibition Arno Plus- has him jamming with others in the upper room of the Lovell Gallery in Woodstock. Meanwhile the lower room is currently exhibiting Arno's art work, in which he occasionally jammed with other known, er, "arty" artists. To be able to paint, and to paint these weird pictures, that's what art is all about, perhaps?



But Carstens succeeds happily in both arenas. It's not well known that his first love was art, before his career as front man for the Springbok Nude Girls took off in the late 1990s. He's since also had a massively successful solo career as a singer, both locally and in London, but he's clearly enjoyed returning to his art, as his large canvas oil paintings - some of them collaborations with the likes of Beezy Bailey and Marinda Swartz - can testify.

## Once a week

The first of the Blind Tiger Sessions has now set the pace for the rest, which will be happening roughly once a week until 14 April, featuring special guests, including The Jack Mantis Band, Shadowclub, Zolani Mahola, Taxi Violence and Karen Zoid.

In a spacious room filled with red-and-black ottoman chairs, soft couches and a few glass tables, Carstens stood dressed all in black with aviator sunglasses (indoors), positively exuding coolness. He seemed to know everyone in the room, mingling to a point at which I began to wonder if my fellow audience members were friends or fans. Either way, I got the impression that Carstens is the kind of guy who would give the same performance to a stadium filled with fans, as he would to friends in his living room.

The first band to play was a group of youngsters called Someone and the Somethings. At a push, I'd categorise them as a jazz band, due to their significant use of brass instruments. But their sound was entirely unique and lacked vocals for most of the performance. Once the vocals came, they were delivered over a megaphone, as opposed to a microphone. The effect of this, especially during a cover of Gorillaz's song Clint Eastwood was really quite eerie, but intriguing and fun.

## An immediate flash of excitement

Carstens played next, opening with Boy, which sent an immediate flash of excitement through the crowd. He was then joined by the ever-impressive Spingbok Nude Girls guitarist, Theo Crous, before calling Someone and the Somethings on stage again to perform Dreamer, with captivating results. They also performed a striking version of Hiroshimama together,

at which point I felt as if they would not have been out of place at a street carnival in Rio. During the Springbok Nude Girls Classic, Blue Eyes, I had some difficulty not jumping up and singing along.

The last band of the evening was Mr Cat & the Jackal, for whom Carstens himself was full of praise. This pair - who look like misplaced members of Kings of Leon - savour elements of folk, blues, rock and country music. Not content with the usual guitar, vocals and drums, they incorporate the triangle, the xylophone, the accordion and even rain sticks. Their lyrics refer to everything from houses to lost shoes, but all with a characteristic theatrical quality.

## **A brilliant concept**

As a grand finale, all of the musicians joined together for a rocking rendition of Joy Division's Love Will Tear Us Apart.

It was a brilliant concept for an unusually groovy evening: hanging out in an art gallery with some very cool South African musicians having an informal jam session. Numbers are limited, but there is a handful of tickets left for the next Blind Tiger Sessions. Get one.

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