**Flight of the Conchords**

**Bio**

Bret and Jemaine first met in 1996 at Victoria University Wellington. Jemaine vividly remembers the first time he met Bret; “he was wearing a hat”. Bret doesn’t remember meeting Jemaine, but says it was unforgettable.

They were both acting in a University Drama Club production called Body Play. Bret and Jemaine were put in a group of five men to create a short theatrical piece about male body issues. The most memorable part of the show was the costumes. They wore nothing but skin coloured bike shorts giving the audience the illusion that they were naked. From that short vignette the group of five developed another pseudo nude show called So, You’re A Man. They performed to sell-out audiences in Wellington and Auckland, and were then invited to perform at the Melbourne International Comedy Festival.

They flew to Australia for a one month season at a Melbourne comedy club called The Last Laugh. The group couldn’t believe they were being paid to perform and Bret blew his entire first pay cheque on a pair of leather pants. Unfortunately the Australians didn’t appreciate the show like they had in New Zealand, and the season was cancelled after one week.

In 1998 Bret and Jemaine decided to start a band. With a combined knowledge of three chords on the guitar they set about jamming out. The first song was Foux Du FaFa, (two chords) and they called themselves Moustache. The four piece band had Bret on casio-tone, Jemaine on guitar, and their friends Toby Laing and Tim Jaray on trumpet and double bass. They performed their one song at the Wellington Fringe Festival late night club and members of the audience were said to have been “mildly impressed” by the act.

After the encouraging feedback the pair continued to write songs in their living room, subjecting their six flatmates to relentless three chord jams. After several weeks they knew four chords and Jemaine got them a gig to perform at the Thursday night Comedy Club. On the afternoon of the gig they realized they needed a band name. The initial list of names included Roxygen Supply, Albatrocity, and Tanfastic. But the final name was chanced upon in a series of events that went something like this: Jemaine went to the bathroom and noticed the flat toilet was called the Concorde, he returned from the bathroom to suggest the name Conchord, and Bret said “What about Flight of the Conchords”, and Jemaine said “okay”, and Bret said “okay “, and Jemaine said “okay then” and Bret said “We should go to the gig, we’re late”.

That night was their first performance as Flight of the Conchords. Bret and Jemaine were so nervous they couldn’t speak between songs. Despite their performance anxiety the crowd of eleven people enjoyed their gig and were heard clapping and talking amongst themselves.

Propelled on by the success of the gig, and the lack of other work in the city the band continued to perform every second Thursday for the next two years. These early songs included “Bowie’s in Space,” “Petrov, Yelyena and Me,” “Rock Beat,” “Lullaby,” “Albi the Racist Dragon,” “Leggy Blonde,” “The Washing Song,” and “Bus Driver.”

By 2000 they had written a dozen songs and decided to escape the New Zealand winter and perform at the Canadian Fringe Festival. The Calgary show was a success, mostly based on the fact that the Friday and Saturday night crowds sold out because the audience thought they were going to a different show.

In Vancouver they weren’t so lucky. The theatre was an abandoned basement hidden away on an alley off a back street, off of another back street. As they arrived at the venue the only sign that it was a theatre was a guy with a can of red paint writing the words ‘The Cavern’ across the garage door. The obscurity of the venue and the general disinterest in musical comedy meant the Conchords had trouble getting an audience and had to cancel many shows. Their smallest audience was just one woman. She had accidentally passed by the venue on her way home and had agreed to watch the show when Bret and Jemaine offered her a free ticket. It wasn’t until the lights came up at the end of the gig that they realised the woman had snuck out of the room during the performance and they’d been playing to an audience of none.

In 2002 they decided to again escape the New Zealand winter. This time traveling to Scotland to perform in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Their venue was an underground tunnel called The Cave. When it rained, which was most days in Edinburgh, the ceiling dripped onto the audience and a dank slime crept down the stone walls. Apparently in the 17th century the room had been used to quarantine plague victims. They performed every night for the month of August and won the Mervyn Stutter Spirit of the Fringe Award. By the time the left they had dozens of fans, and severe chest infections.

They continued to perform at the Wellington Thursday night comedy club, and also did a small number of corporate functions. One such gig was for a Wellington cricket club Christmas function. They performed in the corner of the bar as the cricket club finished their turkey dinner. Unfortunately the inferior sound system meant the lyrics were incomprehensible and Bret and Jemaine were mistaken for a bad covers band. Their song about “Bowie in Space” was heard as an unrecognizable rendition of Bowie’s “Space Oddity.” Unexpectedly three women stormed the stage demanding they could do a better job themselves. Bret attempted to accompany their version of Kenny Rogers’ “The Gambler,” while Jemaine packed up the gear. They both ran out the door leaving Wellington’s own Destiny’s Child singing a cappella.

It should also be noted that Bret was cast as an elf in the *Lord of the Rings* (which led to a recurring role in the trilogy as well as *The Hobbit* movies). While his character was unnamed, fans of the films named him “FIGWIT” (which was short for “Frodo is great… WHO IS THAT!?").

They returned to Edinburgh in 2003 and again performed in the same subterranean grotto. The show had developed to include a xylophone and a dancing toy flower. Their new songs included “If You’re Into it,” “Bret You’ve Got It Goin’ On,” “Sexy Flower,” and “Hiphopopotamus vs. The Rhymenocerous.”

Back in New Zealand Jemaine went shopping at a local pawn shop and discovered a strange digital guitar from the eighties. It was like a casio-tone keyboard but it was a guitar. He tested it out and found that the low-tech hybrid was a mongrel of an instrument definitely not worth $163. The next day Bret went shopping in the same local pawn shop unaware that Jemaine had been there the day before. Bret’s reaction to the strange instrument was quite different. That afternoon he arrived at band practice with the mongrel keytar in his hands. That day the DG20 casio-tone digital guitar begat the song “She’s So Hot Boom.”

In 2004 they returned to Edinburgh this time performing above ground. The sell-out show included the songs “Jenny,” “Business Time,” “Stana” and an unfinished love song called “The Scientist and the French Teacher.”

From their success in Edinburgh the BBC Light Entertainment Department commissioned the band to make a six part radio series. Bret and Jemaine moved to London in 2005 and spent five months writing and recording a mockumentary about the lives of a fictional version of themselves. The show was the first time they collaborated with NZ comedian Rhys Darby who played the character Brian Nesbitt, the fictional band’s manager.

Later that year Bret and Jemaine received an invitation to perform at the Aspen Comedy Festival, in Colorado, USA. Against tradition they left New Zealand’s summer to go to the northern hemisphere’s winter and were shocked by the snow when they stepped off the plane in t shirts and jandles. The HBO executives liked their act and asked them to film a half hour performance for a stand-up comedy show called *One Night Stand*.

Over the next four years they made a TV pilot, a sitcom, released an EP (*The Distant Future*) and a full length album (self-titled LP), toured North America, made a sandwich, filmed a second season of the sitcom, toured North America again, released a second album (*I Told You I Was Freaky*), and went back to New Zealand.

The HBO sitcom became a hit. This, along with the praise for the subsequent album releases (on Sub Pop Records) and the duo’s live show, was the comedic hat trick that catapulted Flight of the Conchords to international sensations.

The Conchords would also see major success individually. Jemaine lent his voice to the character Nigel the cockatoo in the *Rio* films (2011 and 2014). He was cast as “Boris The Animal” in *Men in Black 3* (2012). Jemaine also wrote, produced and starred in a variety of projects including the acclaimed Vampire comedy film, *What We Do In the Shadows* and *People Places Things*. More recently, he joined the cast of *The BFG*, the new Steven Spielberg adaptation of the Roald Dahl book, as the giant named Fleshlumpeater.

Bret has also been hard at work writing and acting for various television and film projects. Most notably *The Muppets* (2011) and *Muppets Most Wanted* (2014), the former of which won him an Academy Award for “Best Original Song” for the power ballad *“Man or Muppet”.* In 2012 he starred in the New Zealand black comedy *Two Little Boys* and then in 2013 he was cast in Jerusha Hess’s romantic comedy *Austenland*.He is currently writing the screenplay and songs for a film adaption of Neil Gaiman’s book *Fortunately the Milk* as well as penning tunes for the upcoming Disney film *Bob the Musical.*

And somehow, between all of the film and TV work, the Conchords managed to co-headline the “Oddball Comedy & Curiosity Festival” alongside Dave Chapelle in 2013.

Jemaine and Bret will return to the U.S. for a summer headlining tour, which features new material exclusive to these shows.