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HOOKED ON A FELINE

The world can't get enough of Meow Meow, who's back home this month, writes **Chris Hook**

Timing is everything when granted an audience with Meow Meow, even via phone. And due to a series of unfortunate events, this correspondent is late.

"So of course, you've caught me at the most fantastic time for you, journalistically, because I'm naked, about to step into the shower – I'd best put a robe on quickly," Meow reveals down the line.

"Although, I have been known to do interviews in the bath, so this does seem like a natural progression."

The First Feline of Cabaret is on the line to talk Club Swizzle, the adults-only extreme-circus-cabaret-sideshow-vaudeville mashup that moves in to the Opera House next week for a long summer run. It follows three super-successful seasons of La

Soiree over the past three summers and comes from that show's creative producer Brett Haylock, who travels the world seeking out the kinds of acts these shows feature. And while often it's just a matter of slotting in those acts, in this instance much of the show's content will be specifically created just for the Club Swizzle concept, which turns on the concept of late-night shenanigans in a bar.

Soundtracking the proceedings will be a live house band in Mikey And The Nightcaps, while among the many breathtaking acts on show are the likes of extreme acrobatics crew The Swizzle Boys, brilliant burlesque cabaret queen Laurie Hagen, old school tap-dancing, wise-cracking, singing showman

Movin' Melvin Brown and a

host with the most in New York drag king comedian Murray Hill.

For her part, Meow is the resident diva for January, a baton she'll pass on to Ali McGregor.

Of course, Meow is no newbie – she's been in and out of the oddball troupe that makes up La Soiree, and now Club Swizzle, for years. It is, as she points out, the closest thing she ever gets to a break.

And she needs it.

Although we take her for granted a little, the world doesn't. The Australian performer, born Melissa Madden Gray, is now a global cabaret superstar, who is wrapping up a two-week

London solo season ahead of

her Swizzle commitments. This has been a big year of shows across Europe and America, with orchestras, solo tours and performances alongside US punk cabaret star Amanda Palmer. And 2015 promises a similarly frenetic schedule, plus the possibility of reprising her 2013 shows with Barry Humphries and the Australian

Chamber Orchestra, celebrating Weimar culture.

"It's always a bit of a holiday for me when I run away to the circus, because they're my friends, and I don't have to bear the weight of the whole show, although I will be sticking my nose into all of it," Meow explains.

"But it's always a bit of a balm because touring life is so very intense on the road when you're by yourself and there is no doubt that I love to be out front of an orchestra, and I do love doing my own shows, but it is such a special time to be at the Opera House and running



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amok for a little while with what I see as my circus family.”

So what does Meow have in store? Well, she does like her surprises to be, well, surprising. So she’s not giving away too much.

“Well I’ve got a few things

planned, which might require things to be built, so let’s just say that. Then, of course, I need to work out what shoes to wear — that is essential — so there is that, then I might write some songs, too,” she says.

chris.hook@news.com.au

Twitter: @EpicChook

• **Club Swizzle, Studio, Sydney**
Opera House; January 9-February 15, \$69-\$110, 9250 7777, sydneyoperahouse.com



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Meow Meow
(main); and with
fellow Club
Swizzle
performer
Murray Hill.