

Glory days live on in Cloudland memories

LIVES changed in an instant on that sprung dance floor and many a romance blossomed to the sound of a big band on the elegant stage. Memories were made of this, the magic that was Cloudland.

HIGH TIMES

WORDS: REBECCA GALTON

PERSONALLY I have no memories that include Cloudland.

I am too young to be able to tell of how I was proposed to on the balcony, how I danced the night away on the sprung floor or how I would ride on the funicular up to the sweeping arch in anticipation of what the night would hold.

In fact, I even had to look up funicular in the dictionary.

Instead, like many of our younger readers, my knowledge of the iconic Brisbane ballroom unfortunately includes little more than its untimely demise at the hands of the Deen Brothers in 1982.

But Cloudland, the little piece of entertainment heaven that stood on the top of Cintra Hill for more than 60 years, was once

a vibrant and happening place.

Just ask your grandparents.

Or just head to the Judith Wright Centre this weekend to catch Leah Cotterell and Helen Russell perform *Foolish Things* – a musical time machine that journeys through Brisbane's entertainment history and looks at three iconic venues, Cloudland, The Primitif and The Zoo.

The demolition of Cloudland made it part of Brisbane folklore but the venue held a special place in the hearts of many long before then.

Christine Burton, whose father Hans Apel owned Cloudland from the 1950s, said the venue should be remembered more for its happy times.

"There is a lot of personal associations and the common law is that a lot of people met their partners there.

"Many special events in people's lives were held there – that is why it is remembered," she said.

QUOTES

"Fifth of May 1951 was our engagement. Ring put on finger on the balcony, then into the studio for a photo. It was a lovely view from the balcony. Like so many, it was a very, very sad night for us when (Cloudland) was pulled down."

– Shirley Jones

Each time we went to Cloudland, the same magic prevailed. The fashion of the time had the girls in beautiful full-length gowns, while the men were in tuxedos, dinner suits or tails."

– Roberta Rayner

No grog was allowed in, except the band used to sneak it in. It got that bad that the guy who owned Cloudland came round and took all the doors off the lockers so you couldn't hide any grog in them. I even sat next to a guy one night with a wooden leg and he'd smuggled in grog in his wooden leg."

– Buzz Ennis



GOLDEN ERA: Music, meetings and marriage feature in Cloudland memorabilia.



LAST DANCE: Leah Cotterell has helped bring Brisbane icon

Cloudland back to life with the production *Foolish Things*.

Life's rhythm reflected in music

FOOLISH *Things* began as a conversation between Leah Cotterell and Helen Russell.

The two Brisbane jazz musicians wanted to know more about the history of their craft and they wanted audiences to learn more about the process of making live music.

Now almost a decade after the conversation begun, they've transformed it into *Foolish Things*.

The show spans 60 years of music, starting at Cloudland – Brisbane's classiest nightspot during the war years and into the 1970s – and moving onto jazz at The Primitif to indie rock 'n' roll reggae at The Zoo, told through the eyes of interviewees who were part of the action.

"It's about the jobbing musicians who just work from week to week because they love doing it," Russell said.

"We know lots of musicians and we've just got an inside view of the game."

Local playwright Philip Dean used stories from the interviews conducted by Cotterell and Russell plus the pair's duet arrangements of classic and contemporary songs, to create the script.

Cloudland features heavily in the show, with 'sweetheart' photos from the venue illustrating the story with a backdrop of painted moons, stars, fountains and roses.

Russell said the venue provided perfect fodder for *Foolish Things*, which features an

original song, *The Last Dance at Cloudland*, written for their double bass and voice act.

"We thought from the beginning it would be great to write at least one song and Cloudland emerged as something to write about," Russell said.

"It has a little war time story, then a 50s and 60s story then a little verse about jumping up and down there in the 80s with spiky hair."

Foolish Things will show at the Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts on October 21 and 22. Tickets are \$27/\$25. Phone 3872 9000.

An accompanying exhibition of nostalgic photographs will show at the centre for one week either side of the show. – Laura Stead