

The Australian 25/6/99

Six sassy singers shine

WOMEN in Voice has become an institution around Brisbane's wonderfully diverse West End, and the six singers showcased in its eighth season have little in common apart from a lifelong love of music and immense talent.

The warm roar of rain on the tin roof of the old Princess provided a uniquely Queensland backdrop for the defiant few gathered in this cauldron of culture as Origin fever gripped the rest of the State. The artists were given free rein to tap into their influences and the result was a whirlwind tour through myriad musical styles as disparate as opera and pop, with personal insights, some original compositions and surprising detours along the way.

Local talent Alison St Ledger opened by exploring the meaning of life in song and philosophy, drawing from sources as diverse as *Monty Python*, the Indigo Girls and Shirley Bassey in a powerful cabaret set. Rising Aboriginal soprano Deborah Cheetham, who has had recent success with her show *White Baptist ABBA Fan*, performed a set that included *As If We Never Said Goodbye* and *Show Me* from *My Fair Lady*.

But it was Joan Sutherland who pointed her towards opera, and when the petite Cheetham sang Puccini's *O mio babbino caro* it was obvious she had found her true calling.

Margaret Roadknight charmed her way into everyone's heart with the self-deprecating cabaret number *Timeless*, followed by a hilarious 50s pastiche that left no cliché unturned, a gospel tribute and a traditional South African song on which she was joined

Music

Women in Voice 8
Princess Theatre, Brisbane.

by the other singers on harmonies for one of the highlights of the evening.

After the interval, Leah Cotterell teamed up with double bassist and musical director Helen Russell in an amusing ode to the medley at the end of the millennium before going solo to display the awesome raw power of blues in a stunning performance that closed with a rousing rendition of the Pretenders' *Hymn to Her*.

A lot of ground had been covered by this point, but nothing could have prepared us for Carita Russell's hilarious vaudevillian performance. To describe it as a one-woman show would barely cover it, as she dissected cheesy standards such as *Islands in the Stream* and *Endless Love*.

Lil' Fi added colour and sass to the show in her retro *Retail Therapy* session, during which she op-shopped a few oldies including *Coat of Many Colours* and threw in some of her own creations, leaving no doubt that she *Loves a Bargain* and can belt out a tune. Her finale of *Say A Little Prayer*, on which she was joined by the others on backing vocals, provided the perfect dessert at the end of this musical smorgasbord.

□ SHANE BRADY