

MY FAVORITE ROOM: Leah Cotterell



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One rare find among many

LEAH Catterell, the bluesy new flame in town, lives in a house which could easily masquerade as a thrift shop.

Almost every nook and cranny either belonged to somebody's grandmother or mother, or had "Buy Me" written on it in one of the secondhand shops haunted by the singer.

The sunroom, her favorite room in this old style house, with quaint picture rails and heavy, stained-glass doors, is a microcosm of this mixture of curios and heirlooms.

As well as being home for her stand of favorite hats, her much travelled daybed and her mother's piano, it is also a space for Leah to listen to music and organise her performance dates.

"I'm trying to get my work together at the moment and this room is where my stereo and desk are — two things which are important right now," she said.

"It is where I can think about what I am doing because it is a peaceful setting. It is also the place in the house where all music emanates from.

"Before I moved in, it wasn't a room for anything. I brought in the piano and the daybed and rehabilitated it."

Leah doesn't play the piano, although the original owner, her mother, is busy taking lessons.

One of her flatmates, Stephen, sometimes plays a song on the neglected creature, but Leah prefers to be in the audience for a change.

Leah: "I absolutely refuse to learn. Why? Because I'm too lazy? No. I like other people to play because I can only play *Chopsticks*. I get annoyed when I

By SANDRA McLEAN
Picture: GLENN BARNES

try to play an instrument because I want to sing all the time."

Leah started singing the blues with her band, The Blues Boys, last year and has established a firm following in Brisbane and on the Gold Coast. She sings about four gigs a week and rehearses two nights.

"I don't do scales or anything like that," said Leah, horrified.

"I play and rehearse, and that's enough to keep me chops in good order."

While many people have just discovered the quality of Leah's voice, she has been a performer for 10 years, doing comedy and drama in Brisbane and around Queensland.

She is a bit of a larrikin (on and off stage), with her warm and gutsy performances finding a new generation who appreciate the blues.

Leah may not play the piano, but it is surrounded by a few of her favorite op shop acquisitions.

Beside the piano is a pot plant atop her latest buy — an old green sink stand — which, luckily, matched the old green cooler supporting the stereo and Leah's daybed, which is like a soft Venus fly trap.

"I meant to put some wood in it, but I've never got around to it," she said. "This is an old favorite. I like to lie on it and chat on the telephone in the sunshine.

"It's not that new, but it is the kind of furniture I like to acquire — the things people throw away. I like the patina of age. That's a nice phrase for you."

Leah could think of no connection between the ballet girl wallpaper and the rest of the decor.

The wallpaper was certainly an individual touch by past owners. It must have sat oddly with the house's former use as a gambling den.

There is a healthy collection of plants in her room (one of her flatmates is a gardener), pictures painted by friends and a photograph of her parents, her father in uniform.

Two pairs of '40s-style shoes sit on the picture rail, which is also home for a few plates and other pieces of porcelain collected by Leah on one of her many thrift shop raids.

"I call it flotsam and jetsam," she said, looking around. "I've bought things and other people have put in their own things.

"I inherit things. I like silly things like porcelain plates and bits of old lace, it doesn't matter how tatty."

Leah is a West End gal and she has lived in that area for most of the past five years. Her house is behind a newsagent on busy Gladstone Road.

Despite the proximity of the house to one of Brisbane's busiest roads, Leah said it was quiet and calm. Living near a newsagent is a new experience, with Leah often seeing the owner at the unsociable hour of 3am.

"I'm just coming home from work and he's rolling out the newspapers," Leah said. "Yeah... it's great. I like this house because it is tranquil and I can come here and relax after work, but it is close enough to have my friends come over for coffee."