

JAZZ

A Tribute to Billie Holiday, Leah Cotterell and Bebopera, Jazz-n-Blues Room, Brisbane City Travelodge

By NEVILLE MEYERS

Leah shows as wholly Holiday

BILLIE Holiday may have been into drugs, drink, power-wielding men and prostitution but she was also into honesty and independence, and left a permanent mark as a distinctive song stylist.

Leah Cotterell chose the cabaret format to reflect on such tragedies and triumphs. But more than an hour-long show was needed to do the subject full justice — and more than a single night's performance to accommodate the spillover crowd.

The performance still worked because, as in previous cabaret excursions (*High Rent, Low Life, Blues in the Night* and *Invitation*), Cotterell mixed her own scripted, gritty dialogue with equally gritty material.

Most of the Holiday classics were there, all sung with raw and raspy honesty, including *My Man, Baby, I Don't Cry Over You, Ain't Nobody's Business* and *Strange Fruit*, but capturing Holiday's vulnerability (*You Go to my Head*).

Like Holiday, Cotterell confined her range to just one or two octaves and relied more on feeling than technical display.

Saxophonist Tony Hobbs wrote the special arrangements and, with pianist Steve Russell, drummer Ken Edie and bassist Helen Russell, gave both excellent support and the appropriate understatement as Cotterell wound her way through the angst.