

Wild women shine in mixed offering

THE trio of acts that make up this cabaret are not presented in order of merit. A pity, because the first item, *Wild Women Don't Have The Blues*, is far and away the best part of the evening's entertainment.

Leah Cotterell, accompanied by Greg Hillcoat, takes us on an educational and musical tour of the great women blues singers of America. It is a revelation that most of those early "sad songs sung slow" were not only sung by women, but were also written by women.

Beginning in the 1920s, with Ma Rainey's *Woman's Blues*, we travel on to Bessie Smith's *Nobody Wants You When You're Down and Out*, Ida Cox's *Wild Woman* and on to the work of Una Mae Carlisle, who was belting out her version of the blues in 1949.

Cabaret

High Rent, Low Life
Street Arts Community
Theatre Company
The Ukrainian Hall
Brisbane

SUE GOUGH

With a voice that is in turn lush, gravelly, deep, rich, lazy and powerful, Cotterell had us all eating out of the palm of her hand.

Her performance was always tongue-in-cheek, sassy and unpretentious. She is, in short, a dish of a cabaret artist.

Cotterell does herself an injustice when she calls herself "a local girl who hasn't quite made good yet". She has more than a touch of star quality and either she is naively unaware of how good she is, or else she's embar-

rassed about rocking the Community Theatre ensemble spirit and going for it.

All she has to do is step beyond these comfortable, supportive confines and dare to mix it in the big bad world of commercial music.

This bracket was all too brief — from here on in, it was a very mixed bag of goodies. A segment by members of the Street Arts Rock and Roll Circus provided a light interlude of breezy, brassy music, juggling and plate spinning.

The main event, a collectively devised collage by the company about landlords, tenants and housing in Queensland, failed to exploit its potential. The subject matter could hardly have been more local or more topical. The Ukrainian Hall sits almost in the shadow of the Expo 88 headquarters and close enough to the site it-

self. The area has become, say local activists, a sociological scandal of evicted tenants and rip-off rents.

While this point was made, the bulk of the material was a mixture of the predictably political (it's wrong to own land and all landlords must be bad), the unoriginal (a Sandy Stone-type monologue that sank under the weight of its own banality) and the pretentious (an odd bit of free verse that seemed to be the wounded cry of a lonely lesbian without any flatmate).

The performers, Katrina Devery, Meg Kanowski, Ann Scanlan and Peter Stewart, are sharp, intellectually committed and most talented. They belted out some great tunes and tap danced like troupers. What they need is material with the wit and style to allow them to shine as brightly as they deserve.