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# Leah crosses the divide

## MUSIC

WHEN singer *Leah Cotterall* was a comic she believed in the power of outrageous dressing.

She once wore a corset of electric circuitry, with a hooped skirt that looked like a cross between *Star Trek* and *Upstairs Downstairs*.

Her old audiences would not recognise the new Leah Cotterall, who has been dubbed the "latest thing" on the Brisbane scene.

Her red hair is short and chic to match her well-cut black dress. Perfect make-up highlights cat-green eyes.

She wears a single piece of jewellery, black seamed stockings and classic shoes.

Just one look is enough to see this lady has style. Just one song says she has soul.

Cotterall's weekly gig with the *Blues Boys* at the *Boundary Hotel* in Brisbane's West End has become a cult event. Next month she'll be at *The Paint Factory*.

Cotterall leads a polished act made up of a mixture of blues, jazz and soul. It crosses the social

boundaries which normally divide Brisbane's population of "straights" and "alternatives".

Crossing this divide has not been easy. Cotterall started making her first tentative steps last year when she was doing benefit shows for community theatre.

"I would do a jazz ballad and all the feminists would be sitting behind their beers shaking their heads and saying: 'Why is she singing this?'"

"Some of the points in the songs were considered quite dubious; but now, because I have a sufficient reputation built up over a year and a half doing comedy acts where I commented on the music as well, people have come around to seeing it the way I see it.

"So the alternative community doesn't have any trouble while the straights think it is fine just because it is quality."

Cotterall has worked in fringe theatre around Queensland for nine years, and once played to

an audience of three at Emerald.

A few weeks ago she sang to a crowd of 1000 at the West End festival.

More than 200 people cram into the *Boundary Hotel* beer garden to listen to one of the best live acts in Brisbane.

She is also popular at the Gold Coast where she does a jazz gig at *Aromas* at the *Marina Mirage*.

Her metamorphosis from fringe comic to stylish songstress has been well planned and perfectly timed.

Blues and jazz are experiencing a revival, with people disillusioned by sparse electronic music.

They are turning back to the soulful songs of the past which were sung by *Billie Holiday*, *Bessie Smith*, *Julia Leigh* and *Nina Simone*.

Their songs were about things that made them blue, in particular their men, with titles such *Dirty Mistreater*, *Long Time Lover* and *Kitchen Man*.

"*Nelly Lutcher* is one of my favorites," Cotter-



**Leah Cotterall**

all said. "She was really rude and outrageous and could play keyboards like no one else.

"I have always loved these old songs instinctively and emotionally.

"It is not something that's particularly intellectual. I just find the songs very beautiful and I don't have much of a taste for modern music because it does not have sufficient dynamic and attention to detail."

**WHEN: December 9, 10**  
**WHERE: Paint Factory**  
— Sandra McLean