



INTERVIEW FIRST PUBLISHED IN TIME OFF, ISSUE: 1391, WEDNESDAY 17TH SEPTEMBER '08

Black Velvet

ECLECTIC BRISBANE SINGER **PEARLY BLACK** HAS BEEN NURSING THE CONCEPT OF *SONGS OF LOVE AND DEATH* FOR A FEW MONTHS NOW. AS SHE TELLS **BAZ McALISTER**, THE HARDEST PART IS KEEPING THE TOM WAITS SONGS OUT OF THE SET-LIST.

Anyone who caught this year's *Women In Voice* will have had a taster of what Pearly Black's Cabaret Festival show *Songs Of Love And Death* is all about. The soulful diva wandered through a selection of songs dealing with the seriously big questions, and is all set to do it again. But this time, she's drawn her influences from far and wide – flamenco, bluegrass, 4KQ, and even medieval Europe.

"I'm not just even pissing about with that one," she laughs. "I'm working on a piece from a Florentine composer from 14... oh, God...14-something, and I was hoping to get an adaptation of it involved in the show. My offside is John Rodgers, and he's been so into flamenco lately, it's through him that I have this piece and we're hoping to meld it into this flamenco-influenced interpretation of it. The piece is basically Mary, mother of Jesus, looking into the future of Jesus while he's still a baby and seeing it all laid out, and she's lamenting it, saying 'Sleep now, darling child, because I can see what's coming your way'. It's incredibly moving, really simple, and really beautiful and kind of rips the fork right out of your nightie!"

Black and Rodgers have been working together for the past 20 years, since they formed the half-band, half-performance group Madam Bones Brothel in Brisbane.

"The vast majority of the repertoire that John and I have shared together seems to quintessentially come back to these moments of love and death," Black says. "I don't know why, we just seem a bit dark. But he is always surprising, and I'm kind of constant. He has this high-metabolism, rodentlike quality, and I'm more 'slow and steady wins the race', so we have this strange symbiosis and it works quite well. He's a joy, and I feel very fortunate to have this ongoing musical relationship with him."

It could be said that in Madam Bones Brothel, the pair were doing cabaret right from the beginning of their careers. But as far as Black is concerned, 'cabaret' is a slippery term to define. It's just a word that got whacked onto her rock band.

"We always just wanted more performance than just standing there toegazing and playing music," she says, "and I guess as soon as you step away from just standing there and playing music, and you put on something a bit glamorous and do your hair – and it was hard to keep John out of dresses for a long time – as soon as you do that, you're called 'cabaret'. It's a big fat term that is hard to pin down. You can be talking about the Berlin cabaret, which is always cool, but 'cabaret' is legitimately applied to the acts in Las Vegas too! To me, it just means that at some point in your repertoire there's some meaty questions posed to audiences, some gnarly questions to ponder and solve."

Black is fast becoming a Brisbane Cabaret Festival regular, having for the last two years performed *Tom Waits For No Man*, a Matilda Award-winning tribute to an artist who, in Black's opinion, "reeks of cabaret". Given his subject matter, some Waits songs will certainly be making the jump to this year's show.

"The problem is keeping the number of Tom Waits songs down!" Black laughs. "I think I've got the record of having covered the most Tom Waits songs of anyone I know. In Madam Bones Brothel, early on, we counted a set list –we used to do these three-set gigs – and there was something like four Tom Waits songs per set. So you'd end up doing 12 Tom Waits songs a night. Unashamedly! Awful! Like a tribute band!"

WHO: Pearly Black

WHAT: *Songs Of Love And Death*

WHERE & WHEN: QPAC Gem Saloon (Studio One) Saturday Oct 4, 7.30pm