

A SLICE OF HISTORY

FOOLISH THINGS by Donat Tahiraj

Vocal and double bass playing duo Leah Cotterell and Helen Russell capture the last 60 years of music in Brisbane in their affectionately titled *Foolish Things* production. It's a multimedia event encompassing a wide variety of sounds, places, memories and hair-dos from Cloudland to The Zoo.

Bassist Helen Russell explains the essence of *Foolish Things*, a theatrical event that pays homage to the working musicians of Brisbane.

"It's a show Leah Cotterell and myself have put together," Russell notes. "Leah and I have been working... well, we've been doing lots of things, but one of our projects have been a double bass and voice duet."

The idea of *Foolish Things* came as Helen and Leah were driving back from an Arts Queensland show in Childers. They wanted to do something that was theatrical and something close to their hearts.

"The plan we hatched was to tell a story that hadn't been told before – the story of the working musicians. Not the ones that get famous, but the ones that play at dances, weddings and venues around town. We were uniquely placed to do so, because we are jobbing musicians, particularly me. I've played with everybody, you know [laughs]. I've done all kinds of gigs in the 20 years I've been playing."

The people Cotterell and Russell spoke to made up a large part of Brisbane's post-War musical tapestry, including the likes of Peter Hackworth (who ran the Primitif, a beatnik coffee house on Queen St where bands such as the Purple Hearts performed), Anne Jones (who wrote for *Canetoad Times* and was one of 4ZZZ's first announcers) and Rick Farbach (the legendary jazz guitarist and arranger who died at age 86) who, as Russell curiously points out, was "[Zero and Go-Betweens bassist] John Willsteed's guitar teacher at school."



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Such facts point out the intertwining of musical generations that make Brisbane seem so small and intimate. And then there's Cloudland, the great ballroom in Bowen Hills that was mysteriously knocked down in the dead of night in 1982.

"Cloudland emerged as a big scene because everyone we spoke to played there," Russell says. "Whether it was back in the 40s at dances, or in the 60s with the 60/40 dances or people who played in functions or socialised there, or played in punk concerts there. Right until it was knocked down, it really was a focus of Brisbane's musical life."

As a tribute to this great venue, Leah Cotterell and Helen Russell wrote and recorded the piece 'The Last Dance At Cloudland' for a four-track EP of the same name.

"[Cloudland] was unique. I only went there once to see Ian Dury & The Blockheads. It turns out Leah was there, but I didn't know her at the time. Leah used to live around the corner from it, so she went to everything that was on there in the late 70s and early 80s."

Helen Russell and Leah Cotterell present *Foolish Things* at the Judith Wright Centre Friday Oct 21 and Saturday Oct 22 (7.30pm). Bookings: 3872 9000.