

WENDY EALEY

Wendy Ealey is one-half of the wonderful Ealey and Tyers, a vocalist who also plays guitar, mandolin and uke. A folk artist in her own right, with many years in the Australian folk scene, Wendy is one more example of the depth of unrecognised musical riches in this country. The singing and harmonising is vibrant and melodic, the lyrics witty, poignant and memorable.

Who were your early inspirations and how did your craft evolve?

My earliest inspiration was Grandpa, a chap with a brilliant ear who rumbled along in harmony to anything. I was determined to figure out how he did it and so at the age of four I started to harmonise too. My first big crush was when I saw Bob Dylan live singing 'Rainy Day Women' in 1965 at Melbourne Town Hall. So raw and so rude I thought then, still do. I wrote my first song at 11.

Tell me a little about your musical journey prior to Ealey and Tyers.

I studied classical singing with Val Mills and took AMEB singing and musicianship exams. I thrived on the discipline of it and apparently got the first High Distinction ever awarded for my first singing exam. I had one guitar lesson from my Dad – D, A and G on his early model Maton! I was a regular at The Outpost Inn, The Greenman, The Commune and The Troubadour for some years and was in the duo Carterhaugh. Then vocal training changed my relationship with my voice and performance. I played with tones, range and feeling what I heard in others' voices.

Obviously finding a musical collaborator who can harmonise with you and vice versa is fairly critical in the singer-songwriter duo format; how did the act form and what does each bring to the mix?

Ealey and Tyers emerged from a Songwriters Guild we founded. Moira is a fine guitarist and we both play various instruments. We often anticipate each other's harmonies and I get to really let rip sometimes, vocally, which is huge fun.

So, apart from the 'Dylan moment', who are some other definitive artists in your career?

My lower register emerged after hearing Joan Armatrading. Maddy Prior's ease helped me overcome self-consciousness and Janis Ian moved me to sing less and trust the song; 'Jesse' is my absolute favourite to sing. I discovered velvet voiced, nimble fingered Eric Bibb at an Anne McCue gig, she's very fine. Bibb's 'Roadworks' is on high rotation at home.

Without a so-called 'hit', it's pretty difficult getting to big audiences at other than festivals isn't it? How do you maintain a positive outlook and what do you have coming up to promote your music?

The positive outlook ebbs and flows, but the urge to play doesn't. It's strange blowing your own trumpet and writing bump which suddenly reads like you're talking about someone else. Being an incurable chatterbox, I also work as an MC and try to cross-promote when I can and I get about a bit with two songwriting awards

I coordinate and of course, the Guild. I organised gigs in the UK and Denmark a couple of years ago and was amused to read one club's tempter – "when a little bird told us Australian singer-songwriter Wendy Ealey was coming to the UK, we just had to snap her up!" The little bird was me and I probably said something like, "Would you mind awfully if I played at your club?" The club was bursting at the seams though and the gig was lovely. In Denmark I was the warm-up for the very popular Allan Olsen, Scandinavia's answer to Dylan. The write-up promised, "One of Melbourne's biggest voices, Wendy Ealey will be making it hot for Olsen!" Right now I'm looking forward to some developmental time with Moira over Christmas, mixing the *Unsung Heroes Of Australian History* album and finishing songs. Then it's off to the Tamar Valley Festival in January.

How would you define your music stylistically? It's always something that pops up in the typical festival application doesn't it?

I would define it as acoustic roots sometimes verging on country, particularly songs like 'Clues'. Because of the issue-based subjects of some of my songs, I am inevitably labelled folk by some, and surprisingly I have some very enthusiastic supporters who insist it's blues. Melodic, and strongly lyric-based – I'd love festival applications to have that on their list.

What sort of instrumental approaches do you go through when arranging the accompaniment to your songs?

My focus has been on vocals, particularly multiple layered harmonies because that's what I understand the most. As I've become more confident as a musician I now hear space for other instruments. I was given a lovely Martin by a 'fan' – thanks to you Nick. That honour inspired my guitar playing to travel the fret board more imaginatively. I don't write with an instrument so I'm always interested to find out how the song will end up playing and then try to move beyond the basic chords. Moira works up a song

from a guitar piece she concocts, while I have the words and tune, style and mood of the narrative and then work out instrumentation in response. Sometimes a solid rhythmic bed is the starting point. In 'Child Of My Heart', the playing is responsive to the lyric and quite sparse. 'Cautionary Tale' is as frenetic as the song, with a relentless driving rhythm, the song calls the shots. At the moment I'm writing a song for the UHAH project about the first woman jockey Bill 'Girlie' Smith – it's going to have quite a lot of counter-vocal play and I'm afraid I hear a bit of banjo coming on!

Wendy will be coming to a festival or folk venue near you soon with a number of great recent recordings.

Visit www.wendyealey.com.au and <http://www.myspace.com/EaleyandTyers>

