

Katie Noonan | AGWA | til Feb 19 | ★★☆☆½

Entering the space with the Sartory String Quartet, Katie Noonan sits at the baby grand piano on stage in the Art Gallery of Western Australia. Within seconds, Noonan whisks the audience away into her music composing world on Stradbroke Island, giving us insight into the life experiences and stories behind each piece as she wrote it.

Trained in both classical and jazz voice at the Queensland Conservatorium (and through decades of making music) her singing combines improvisational, dissonant jazzy harmonies, with the technical prowess and range of a classical singer all wrapped up into an elite, multidimensional instrument.



From the moment she sits down, it was clear that singing at the piano is her happy place. Chatting between pieces, Noonan shares anecdotes and snippets from where she was and what she was living through when she composed each piece.

This concert repertoire contains works from throughout her entire career giving us a little insight into her musical journey that spans decades. I often find it hard to really appreciate the lyrics of Noonan's work when seeing her perform live as I get so swept up in the breathtaking sounds – and tonight was no different.

Her enchanting, angelic tone soared through the gallery and hung in eaves of the acoustically beautiful venue, enveloping the audience in the colourful and resonating world she creates on stage. Accompanied by the Perth's Sartory String Quartet, the musicianship and artistic sensitivities of the ensemble complemented Noonan's compositions and vocal timbre superbly.

Passionate about the importance of music education and funding the arts in Australia, Noonan facilitates composing, jazz, and classical workshops, and performance opportunities, and recently composed a work for Classic FM's Virtual Choir.

She performed three of ten pieces that she commissioned Australian composers to write, set to the text of Aboriginal leader and activist Aunty Oodgeroo Noonuccal's poems.

The final piece she sung from this song cycle was titled *A Song of Hope* in which she spoke about the timeless and devastating message behind the words. Here is a snippet of the text: 'Look up my people, the dawn is breaking, the world is waking to a new bright day. When none defame us, no restrictions tame us, nor colour shame us, nor

sneer dismay. To our fathers' father, the pain, the sorrow; to our children's children, the glad tomorrow'.

There was a magical moment last night when she'd finished singing this piece, but the applause hadn't yet begun – for a split second it felt like the whole audience was suspended as one, recovering from the goosebumps and collective spine tingles before being snapped back into reality.

One thing I love about watching Noonan perform live is her genuineness and unapologetically honest presence on stage. Her passion for composing, performing, and connecting with her audience was palpable.

Her ability to connect with the audience through authentic story telling was enhanced by her enchanting multi genre vocals and sublime musicality. You could feel the graciousness in the room – from Katie, from the instrumentalists, and from the audience being able to immerse themselves in this live, intimate concert that provides you with a soul nourishing smorgasbord of musical delights to feast your senses on.

Katie Noonan is playing at the Art Gallery of WA on Saturday Feb 19, and in Bunbury on Sunday Feb 20. For tickets and more information, head to perthfestival.com.au

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