

PEOPLE



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"It was a privilege to be on the crest of that wonderful wave."
Pic: RUPHIN COOTZER

Laurika Rauch has changed her tune — literally. The former mistress of "Musiek en Liriek" is now curling her silken tongue round the songs of Jacques Brel. She discusses the shift in direction of her career in a talk with ROGER DEAN.

Rauch — a new direction

"What I'm doing right now," says Laurika Rauch, "reflects where I am in my head."

And that, she freely admits, is somewhere rather different to where she was four years ago.

Then she stood in the vanguard of the lyrical movement in Afrikaans music, the new sung poetry that unleashed a wave of fashionable intellectualism and filled places like the Market with rapturous, if esoteric, applause.

"Today," says Laurika sadly but realistically, "luisterliedjie is a little bit of a swear-word."

"The records are still being made — and they are still not selling. The movement has burrowed underground in order to protect itself."

It's hardly a charge one could level at Brel. That series of shows keeps on resurfacing, and like a hardy annual, displays no sign at all of wilting.

It was the soft-eyed expressiveness of Laurika's face that first attracted Taubie Kushlick, not the rich-toned voice that is so suited to the lyrics. And when she was asked to return, she overcame her misgivings because, quite simply, "It's the most special show I'm ever likely to be involved in."

Not that Laurika's Brel is quite the same as Taubie's: there's no celestial love affair there. She can't get all that excited about his role as a poet, his place in posterity, though she greatly admires him as a singer and composer.

"Taubie and I spent six weeks together on text analysis," she said, "working on technique and the direction to take with a particular word or phrase."

"Brel's own phrasing is absolutely extraordinary. You can't imitate it in English, but we have tried to keep more of his original interpretation this time round."

"That's what is so amazing working with Taubie: she takes you places you have never been as an artist. But when you get out on that stage you know exactly what you want to do with a song."

Sipping coffee in the quiet of her Westdene courtyard, Laurika reflected on her new commercialism. Gone is the purist philosophy of art for art's sake; make your statement and never mind the public.

"I suppose I'm a bit of a split personality at the moment," she said.

"I have made some concessions, but I don't feel I have compromised myself in any way. For one thing, I have become less deep myself as a person."

"I used to experience all the depths of the artistic soul" — with a short deprecating laugh — "but all that has gone. I just feel I need more light relief now."

"It's something to do with growing up,

maybe, with experiencing some of the sorrows of life first-hand — perhaps with having a small child to look after. It does tend to change one's perspective."

"No, I wouldn't say I am any happier in myself. I'm simply not the same person that I was."

Eve Boswell, her singing teacher, may have helped her on her way when she said that in order to succeed as a singer in South Africa, one had to be either black or Afrikaans. Not just an obligation, but an opportunity.

Her latest LP, "Jy is te Dierbaar", is more melodic, more romantic than any of the others. The lyrics by Kupido are there more to entertain than to teach.

And it's likely to sell more copies than any since her original "Debut", which contained her famous "Kinders van die Wind".

Laurika has stopped composing herself.

There is no longer a market for the poignant, meaningful songs that made her name, and the material is scarcely suitable when she is asked to sing.

"When I started out I felt obliged to show the public how serious I was," she said. "I didn't want to waver, to diversify at all, only to refine my art."

"But I have had my say. It was a privilege to be on the crest of that wonderful wave, and I have three albums that stand as a legacy, should anyone be interested."

"I had a good innings to prove myself, which is more than most artists can point to. I don't feel any need to explain myself further, and I don't particularly want to."

"Now is the time to change and to grow," she said. "Just as long as there's life after Brel."



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