



The Alhambra's new soul-stirring musical review, *Hoagy, The Man and his Music*, has taken off with rave reviews thanks to its performers, all wrapped up in Hoagy's jazz melodies, Lisa Michaelson, David Dennis and Laurika Rauch

PRETTY WOMAN!

Singer Laurika Rauch has notched up an impressive number of successes as a musical entertainer. Her latest project, *Hoagy, The Man and his Music*, recently opened to rave reviews. Story and pictures Carrie Curzon

As a teenager, husky-voiced Laurika was always expected to take her guitar when invited to Varsity parties: she reckons she was so shy and introverted in those days everyone knew that that was the only way they were likely to hear her voice.

To meet her today you would never believe it, for a more easy-going, friendly character it would be hard to find. An infectious throaty chuckle punctuates her conversation and she tosses her auburn mane with girlish glint in those cool jade eyes that far belie her 39 years.

Stardom has certainly not swollen this Pretty Woman's head, even if she has notched up an impressive number of successes as a musical entertainer.

Currently appearing at the Alhambra in the new soul-stirring musical revue, *Hoagy, The Man and his Music*, Laurika is riding the crest of a wave as far as her theatrical career is concerned. A well-established singer (with seven solo LP's to her credit), cabaret artist and TV star, this latest role is such a challenge for her, she can hardly contain her excitement.

When still in rehearsal last month,

Versatility is Laurika Rauch's middle name: singer, cabaret artist, TV star, mother, and yet more...



Laurika was in raptures about her debut in the jazz world. Taking the lead in the revue that is compiled and directed by Jimmy Bell and which stars two other well known singers, Lisa Michaelson and David Dennis, she found herself being stretched to capacity by grueling rehearsals. It was a non-stop seven-hour-a-day experience, learning her demanding singing/acting routine and mastering dance sequences that were the fastest she has ever tackled. She also spent hours listening to jazz as well as researching the subject.

But there were certainly no regrets - far from it. "It has all been an incredible experience," purred this larger-than-life lady in her deep throated, easy-listening voice. "Jazz singing was something I had never done, but when I was offered the part, my colleagues advised me to go for it as they thought I had just the right voice. That somehow gave me the 'chutzpah' to say yes, and from then on as I started to get the right vibes about jazz, it just got more and more exciting."

The timeless music of Hoagland Howard Carmichael (Hoagy), an American white composer who died in his eighties and whose songs are of the bootlegging, *Ain't Misbehavin'* era, is hugely popular. His best known numbers include such gems as *Stardust*, *I Get Along Without You Very Well*, *Up a Lazy River* and *Two Sleepy People*, all of which appear in the show.

Prior to the show opening, Laurika was getting her biggest kick performing the hit song, *Georgia*. For some reason this particular number really "happened" for her, and she tried to explain why: "Sometimes you get to a certain stage where something is just totally right. You become almost trance-like as you are singing and when that happens you can do almost anything."

The joy of Hoagy's music, and probable reason for its wide appeal is that his refrains are such easy listening. A point he summed up in an interview before his death, Laurika quoted: "I never write jazz songs, I just write good melodies."

Laurika's musical career goes back to her early childhood in Cape Town, where she started piano lessons at the age of five. "It seemed an accepted fact in our household that my life was to

revolve around music," she says.

Although her parents were not musicians themselves, both her brother and sister were born with natural artistic talent and the three children all sang in the Pinelands' choir, *Oom Hannes Uys se Kindersangkring*.

Most weekends Laurika would attend concerts by the Cape Town Symphonic Orchestra and by the age of ten she had sung her first solo.

After matriculating (with music as a special subject), she completed a drama degree at the University of Stellenbosch, then taught for a year before moving to the Transvaal in 1975.

Describing herself as "a typical Sixties kid", Laurika taught herself to play the guitar which she describes as a watershed in her musical life. But it was in the Transvaal that her acting abilities came to the fore when she started working with Paet Playwork under Robin Malan.

After freelancing as an actress for several years, she performed in two of Taubie Kushlik's "Brel" productions - 1981 and 1983 - which were her first major roles in the English medium.

Although best known for her performances in her mother tongue, Laurika sees herself as completely at home in either medium. Her economist husband is English speaking and her two children, Simon and Nina, both go to English-speaking schools.

Despite her blossoming success as an all-round entertainer, she still considers herself to be essentially family orientated and tries to keep any spare time she has for her young children.

"It's obviously hard in my job to lead a balanced life and when I am performing, I can spend several weeks away from home at night. I always remember Meryl Streep saying that the most important thing to her as a mother was putting her children to bed, and there are often times when I just cannot do that. But I do try and spend as much time with them as possible. I try to run my life so that my family does not come second."

In the mid-eighties Laurika was invited overseas to perform in London and Belgium, while in the latter part of the decade she built up a considerable following for her cabaret appearances - the most popular of which was probably the Stephan Bouver cabaret/concert *Van Berlyn tot Bapsfontein*, for which she received the 1988 Gallow award for the best performance in a musical.

"Maybe in the future I will think about travelling again - but it wouldn't be for long stretches of time. I also have other interests that I would like to pursue."

Laurika nurtures a childhood dream of having her own studio in the garden where she can make a name for herself as a "stained glassmaker". Stained glassworks is a hobby she has had to put on hold, but she promises herself her own workshop one day - and the time - to indulge this passion.

Up until now music has taken the leading role in her life, and now with the incredible demand for her appearance in stage shows, her time is even more at a premium. "When I am rehearsing I am hardly at home and I never have time to go to the shops," is her one regret. "When I am not working I use the time to conserve my energy, but when I am, it is a wonderful concentrated time that I can only describe as living under siege. But I love it!"

Hoagy, The Man and his Music runs until mid-October. □