

Tonight

TUESDAY

EDITED BY BARRY RONGE

SA's 'Amber Jewel' in concert

BY BARRY RONGE

Laurika Rauch, one of South African music's few enduring stars, has probably survived as long and as lustrously as she has because she has a healthy distrust of fame.

She graduated from Stellenbosch University with a drama degree in 1974 and with her heart firmly set on a theatrical career.

Her head, however, warned her that success was elusive and while she went through her "struggling young actress" routine she also took a teaching degree part-time.

Four years of waiting in the wings for the big part to come along took its toll and in 1978 she resigned herself to what looked like an inevitability and started teaching Afrikaans at Sandown High School.

So how come she's about to open a new show "Laurika Rauch Sings Brel and Other Favourites" at the Alhambra Theatre on March 29?

The answer is that she became a ghost, or more accurately a ghost voice for Jana Cilliers in the TV production "Phoenix en Kie".

The songs she sang were varied, but one of them, "Kinders van die Wind" became a grand-slam hit. It may have been Jana on screen miming the song, but it was Laurika's voice that

caught the attention of the whole country.

She put away her chalk and her lesson-plans and went back to showbiz, no longer as an actress who could also sing, but as a singer whose dramatic

skills made her music vibrantly expressive and unique.

She doesn't like to have her work analysed too deeply, she's a practical, clear-sighted individual who neither

courts nor entirely trusts theories about her work.

But she has been exceptional in the way her music has captured the spirit of an age.

It was not accidental that when "Kinders van die Wind" became such a hit the Afrikaner community, in particular, were experiencing a radical change.

The old certitudes were losing ground, the almost symbiotic relationship between the Afrikaner language and Nationalist politics was beginning to detach.

There was a new generation of young urban Afrikaners drifting on the winds of change

that finally blew us to last year's election and her song captured the mood perfectly.

Blessed with work from literate and poetic songwriters, she has built steadily on that impressive debut and her songs have become a delicate melodic counterpoint to the social change we have all lived through.

Her most recent chart success, "Mannetjies Roux", that plaintive prayer for a bit of rain, a sense of direction and new breed of hero was as much a distillation of the mood of Afrikaners at that moment as "Kinders van die Wind" was.

But Laurika did not

only sing songs of this country. A fortunate collaboration with the late Taubie Kushlick had Laurika singing the songs of Jacques Brel with such clear insight and tenderness that he could have written them for her alone.

As I have observed before, her voice not only has the tawny, glowing warmth of amber, it has the ability to capture fragments of the past emotion just as amber does.

Part of the mysterious beauty of an amber jewel is the ability to see within it fragments of wings and leaves gathered up decades, even centuries

before.

Brel's songs are haunted by such memories, studded with fragments of old passions and remembered pain. Her voice evokes so much more than it says and it is a perfect match for his lyrics.

Her new show brings us the best of both sides of her career. The first half will be a greatest hits trip through her own repertoire and the second will be a collection of her favourite Brel songs, which makes an irresistible combination.

Laurika Rauch's new show opens at the Alhambra Theatre on March 29.



Practical and clear sighted ... Laurika Rauch.