

THE AUSTRALIAN

Original tunes help shake blues away



Frances Madden, performing in Penrith on Saturday night...PHOTO CREDIT CLARE HAWLEY

MUSIC

Frances Madden

Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre, Penrith, November 28

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ERIC MYERS

In a 90-minute performance which became more authoritative and moving as it went along, pianist/singer/songwriter Frances Madden launched her new album *Beautiful World* on Saturday night.

Accompanied by an instrumental quintet and two background vocalists, Madden opened with three tunes from the album: *Dancing In The Street*, *Practical*

Magic, and *You're Doing So Well*. They were professionally played but, after six months of home isolation, courtesy of the pandemic, it was not surprising that during the initial stages of the concert, both performers and audience appeared tentative and needed warming up.

Guest violinist Ian Cooper entered the fray in the following number *Paris Melody*, which Madden wrote during a visit to that great city. Cooper, Australia's most brilliant jazz violinist, effectively broke the ice with his extraordinary playing, and subsequently lifted everyone's spirits in tunes such *The Tango Never Lies*, and *Side By Side*.



Australia's most brilliant jazz violinist Ian Cooper: lifting everyone's spirits...

It's usually risky for an artist such as Madden to rely so heavily on her own original compositions but, in her case, they are the key to her success. Her confidence in her own works is palpable and highly justified. While some of her songs are cute enough to appeal to teenyboppers, the lyrics in most of them are, underneath a veneer of pop sensibility, sophisticated and perceptive, not to mention mischievous. These lyrics, full of ambiguity and irony are, in the best sense of the word, hip.

The origins of her compositions can be mysterious. On the face of it, *You're Doing So Well* sounds like a rather sad tale of lost love. At this performance Madden revealed that it was inspired in fact by returning home after a long absence to find that her orchid had flourished while she was away. Believe this if you will.

In a repertoire of excellent songs two stood out: *Side By Side* (described by the composer as a song about hope) and *The One Who Walks Me Home*, (I won't attempt to paraphrase the poetic lyrics of this tune). To hear both sung so beautifully by Madden towards the end of the performance was a profoundly moving experience. Only a vastly talented songwriter produces such works.

As good as Madden is, her product was immensely assisted by the brilliant jazz instrumentalists who made up her backing band: Carl Dewhurst (guitar), Brett Hirst (bass), Tim Geldens (drums), Ray Cassar (trumpet, organ) and Karl Laskowski (tenor sax).



Three of the brilliant jazz musicians who made up the quintet backing Madden: L-R, Karl Laskowski (tenor saxophone), Ray Cassar (trumpet) and Tim Geldens (drums)... PHOTO CREDIT CLARE HAWLEY

Lovely vocal harmonies, also an essential part of the wide variety of sounds that make up Madden's music, were provided by Borbala Bodonyi and Rosalia Lonergan.



Madden with background singers Rosalia Lonergan (left) & Borbala Bodonyi (right)... PHOTO CREDIT CLARE HAWLEY

Frances Madden spends much of her time at the keyboard judiciously accompanying her vocals with exquisite fills, suggesting that her piano capabilities are limited. When she chose to open out, however, she was able to play jazz piano with authentic brilliance. This was particularly the case in the standard *Give Me The Simple Life*, where she paid tribute to Canadian pianist Oscar Peterson, and in her tune *Shake The Blues Away*, which closed the concert in triumphant fashion.
