

TRIBUTES *to musical greats*

The music of some favourite golden oldies, from Doris Day to the Big Bopper, is enjoying a revival on the local stage. **Chris Herden** reports

Brisbane audiences will never get to see Doris Day (now in her 80s) or the late John Denver performing on stage but the next best thing to the stars in their heyday is about to hit town.

Golden Guitar Awards winner Melinda Schneider and Beaudesert-born singer/songwriter Rick Price are both starring in tributes to these iconic stars that will showcase not only their famous songs but also delve into their private lives.

It was Doris Day's gun-totin' tomboy in the musical *Calamity Jane* which started Melinda Schneider's love affair with Hollywood's all-American girl-next-door and her music. An invitation to perform a set of songs from this movie at Melbourne's Midsummer Festival in 2003 provided the genesis for *Doris - So Much More Than the Girl Next Door* on until 22 May at the Twelfth Night Theatre, Bowen Hills.

"The response was just overwhelming and it planted the seed for something that has taken me eight years and a lot of hard work to get together," Schneider says. "Doris Day was an incredible singer, dancer

and wonderful actress - a world class talent. They are hard shoes to fill but I am giving it my very best."

Schneider dug deep into Day's personal life and along the way discovered many similarities with her own, namely a German catholic heritage and a history of messy relationships. "We go through everything that happened to Doris - her four horrible husbands, she didn't have a great run at choosing men, all of her films, her co-stars and lots of interesting things that happened to her along the way," Schneider says.

"A train crashed into her car when she was about 16, broke her legs and they didn't think she was going to walk again, let alone dance. It took two years to heal and during that time she realised she had a singing voice and so started focusing on this and it changed her whole life and career."

Schneider plays the storyteller, linking almost 30 songs with a close look at Doris Day's turbulent love life and disastrous financial battles and, in her later years, an unfettered devotion

to animal welfare. "There is dancing in some of the numbers as well and it is very Hollywood, lots of colour and movement and I think we'll make (the audience) cry and laugh along the way."

Also making a Brisbane homecoming at the same theatre is Nashville star and former Beaudesert boy, Rick Price, in *Take Me Home Country Roads*. This moving tribute to one of America's most treasured musical icons, John Denver, starts 12 July. The production is from the same team that created the Helpmann Award-winning Johnny Cash show, *The Man in Black*.

Take Me Home Country Roads interweaves John Denver's classic hits with a story telling of the singer/songwriter's personal life. "Our narrative-driven concert tells of a man whose pristine public image was far removed from his troubled personal life," Price says. "John was a complex and conflicted character, was always on tour and very committed to his career and I think he paid for that in his personal life."

Price, who once shared the stage with John Denver in an early 1990s Brisbane



Melinda Schneider stars as Doris Day

concert, says he was attracted to the opportunity to reflect on Denver's public and private life. "I've found it challenging (but) he was quite a craftsman who wrote fantastic songs." *Take Me Home Country Roads* will feature Denver's timeless hits *Thank God I'm a Country Boy*, *Leaving on a Jet Plane*, *Annie's Song* and *Rocky Mountain High*.

Two more shows coming to the Twelfth Night Theatre later this year will also pay homage to musical superstars. From 15 June J.P. Richardson Jr. will ignite the stage with the stories and songs of his legendary dad, *The Big Bopper* (also starring Flip Simmons as Richie Valens and Scot Robin as Buddy Holly), and *In Dreams - The Roy Orbison Story* opens on 24 October.



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