

Ronnie Taheny  
The Governor Hindmarsh Hotel  
Saturday, February 4, 2012.

Great storytellers in song have become a rarity; too many truths ring hollow, too many melodies carry an empty message. Ronnie Taheny, in striking contrast, is conspicuous as a great storyteller who wraps poignant tales in clever words, then envelops them in pretty pop melodies. For 20 years she achieved this as a solo artist, building a mighty catalogue of songs in the process – and she has never sounded better.

Her recent two-year break from performing and recording has been a significant refresher. It has given her time to take pause, reconsider her delivery, focus more intently on the message and meaning of each lyric, and create a sharper, more clearly defined performance, characterised by greater accuracy, greater tenderness, greater charm and appeal.

In essence, she is allowing each composition to breathe more deeply. There is less force applied to the music, but a more powerful dynamic sweep to each song; less hurried vigor and more deliberate focus on nuance and telling phrases. It has added an arresting quality to her music.

This is perhaps most telling in her opening set, with Taheny alone at the grand piano or on guitar, drawing lush life into such moving pieces as Irish Girls' Wake, Aida, Cinderella and the warm, captivating Montana.

However, the full picture of Taheny's live delivery is completed during a second set, as she works with the magnificently musical Jarrad Payne, juggling duties on drums, percussion, synthesisers, bass guitar and harmony vocals. While this role seems all too much, he never adds too much, his tasteful touch adding just the right level of embellishment, a vibrant palate of colours that adds lovely texture and sparkle to the arrangements without ever crowding those important words and stories.

Ironically, in opening herself up to the audience more fully, Taheny is also at her most calm and self-assured. It's a confidence that is recognised, as this concert drew silent attention and respect from her audience. They appreciated that such intimacy and delicacy in delivery is something special, something rare, and were not prepared to break the spell.

Ronnie Taheny is now comfortable addressing her songs with an honesty and aching tenderness that can bring you to tears. So searing is the intimacy of Photograph (her worthy signature song that has grown strong and mighty with age) and so confronting are the self-effacing truths of Wasting Away that an audience is swept along on a quite overwhelming journey of story and song. After 20 years of solo recording, she has a cohesive body of material that stands as be the envy of any other troubadour.

David Sly