

TORTURED SOUL

DUSTY SPRINGFIELD'S TERRIFIC TALENT CAME WITH A DESTRUCTIVE DARK SIDE – NOW WELL AND TRULY IN THE SPOTLIGHT.

FEAR NOT! *Dusty* is not one of those dreaded tribute acts like Bjorn Again, Kisstroyer or the endless Elvis and Beatles shows that relentlessly tour the globe. *Dusty* is a serious and lovingly scripted drama that brings the woman behind the legend to life. A true tribute.

David Campbell has recently played Bobby Darin in *Dream Lover* and Tim Draxl toured with *Freeway: The Chet Baker Journey*, and this month Amy Lehpamer zips up the shimmering evening gown, bouffants up the wig and dabs on the “panda eye” mascara to take the lead in this The

Production Company show.

Previously titled *Dusty – The Original Pop Diva*, it was



Amy Lehpamer taps into her inner Dusty Springfield.

originally written by Australians John-Michael Howson, David Mitchell and Melvyn Morrow, who had already penned the Johnny O’Keefe musical *SHOUT!* It premiered in 2006 at the Victorian State Theatre with Tamsin Carroll in the lead role and earned high praise, including four Helpmann Awards.

Musical theatre audiences will be familiar with the new *Dusty*. Lehpamer’s work has included Sherrie in *Rock Of Ages*, Reza in *Once* and Janet in *The Rocky Horror Show*. Many will be interested to see her transform from her the virtuous Maria Von Trapp into the more feverish Springfield.

Dusty Springfield is often grouped together with contemporary singers of her era such as Cilla Black, Lulu and Petula Clark, but what set Dusty apart?

Well, Elton John called her “the greatest white singer there ever has been.” Lehpamer agrees, adding, “It was also Elton who mentioned the vulnerability in her voice. It’s a powerful sound, but the emotional life in her songs is so nuanced.

She was about telling a story and she was very particular about how her songs were produced. Add her incredible musicality and that immediate, yearning tone she has, and you’ve got an extraordinary, once-in-a-lifetime package.”

Adulation, accolades (an OBE) and recognition around the world did little to calm the terrible voices of

Dusty’s damaged psyche. An icon of London’s ’60s music and

fashion scene, her

many hits (16 in the Top 20) included *I Only Want To Be With You, You Don’t Have To Say You Love Me, Son Of A Preacher Man, Wishin’ And Hopin’* delivered

in her soulful, husky voice that echoed the Motown soul of the time.

But Springfield’s personal life was a horrible mess. Her homosexuality was kept secret although she was in a relationship with Norma Tanega from the mid-’60s to the early ’70s. She never had a male partner so public speculation about her sexuality was intense. When she relocated to the USA in the ’70s her drinking and reliance on prescription medications spiralled out of control. Her relationship with long-term partner Teda Bracci (they met at Alcoholics Anonymous in the ’80s) was fiery, often violent. Dusty attempted suicide on multiple occasions, self-harmed, was diagnosed as bipolar and was haunted by the fear that her talent and looks were being harshly judged. Cancer eventually took her life in 1999.

Before her death, Dusty enjoyed a late ’80s revival thanks to Pet Shop Boys and their collaborative hit *What Have I Done To Deserve This* (her biggest hit in the USA), and the subsequent album *Reputation* in 1990. New ’90s audiences discovered her back catalogue when Quentin Tarantino including *Son Of A Preacher Man* in *Pulp Fiction*.

“Dusty and I are very different,” says Lehpamer. “I have an incredible amount of empathy for her, for the difficulties she faced and I relate to her being a woman with a strong sense of what she wanted. But Dusty’s battles with her sexuality, her mental health and her sense of self-worth are to an extreme I haven’t experienced. I have an immense amount of respect for her.”

Dusty’s story, aided by her musical legacy, is perfectly suited for the stage: the 2005 American play *A Girl Called Dusty*, an earlier 1995 Australian production *I Only Wanna Be With You*, and the recent Seekers musical, *Georgy Girl* saw Michelle Smitheram as Dusty.

“I’ve been listening to her music non-stop, reading various biographies and chasing down clips of her interviews,” says Lehpamer. “It’s about making all I’ve learned translate to the stage – including learning how to do her outrageous make-up!”

MORE: theproductioncompany.com.au/dusty/