

# Michelle Nicolle Quartet

Biography

[www.michellenicolle.com](http://www.michellenicolle.com)



*"an Australian jazz singer ready to command a world stage."* Sydney Morning Herald

**Australian Jazz Awards (Bells)** winner 2017, **Mo Award** 2001, 2003 & 2004 (Australian Entertainment Ind), **National Jazz Award** (1998) winner and **A.R.I.A Finalist** 2001,2004 (Australian Recording Industry), Michelle Nicolle is a jazz musician whose chosen instrument is Voice.

Known for her ability to get right to the heart of a song, as well as being an in the moment improviser Michelle has continually developed and nurtured her art form with the help of her quartet. As well as releasing 7 CDs the MNQuartet has toured extensively throughout Australia and internationally - in 2005 performing at the **North Sea Jazz Festival** in The Netherlands.

Arranger, band leader and award-winning jazz vocalist Michelle Nicolle started her musical career when she began the violin at the age of eight in the Barossa Valley, South Australia in the 1970s. Based in Melbourne, she is now celebrated as Australia's finest jazz singer.

As a country girl Michelle grew up listening to pop music and old movie tunes, playing in the Barossa Valley Schools Orchestra, and teaching herself to play the Angaston Town Hall's grand piano ~ whilst her father worked, polishing the dance floor. Throughout High School, music continued to dominate. She moved up the ranks of the Orchestra, kept 'nutting out' pop tunes on the piano (Prince & Duran Duran!!), blew 3<sup>rd</sup> cornet in a local marching band and sang in every choir on offer.

In 1985 Michelle was accepted into the Adelaide University - playing the violin. Surprisingly, Michelle says she didn't develop an interest in jazz until 1986 when she started singing with the university *Adelaide Connection* Jazz Choir. Hearing for the first time about Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald and Chet Baker, Michelle soon immersed herself in their music- deciding that this was the music that her heart wanted to follow. In 1987 she swapped her major to "Jazz Voice".

She began transcribing the great horn players Miles Davis, Freddie Hubbard, Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie - learning the language of improvisation through chord changes. When she completed her teaching degree, Michelle went on to study for her Associate Diploma of Jazz, where she "got into be-bop in a big way!" These two years, Michelle says, were the most important of her musical life as they laid the foundations for her wanting to make a career in playing jazz.

Several musical ventures, including the 5-piece vocal group *Vo-Cool* and her own quintet, followed. In 1995 Michelle moved to Melbourne to live.

At the 1998 Wangaratta International Jazz Festival Michelle won the prestigious **National Jazz Award** ~ the judges included the legendary be-bop singer Sheila Jordan (USA), current *Blue Note* star Kurt Elling (USA).

*"I have loved Michelle Nicolle's singing perpetually and without ceasing since first I heard her. Michelle is a singer born to sing, born to charm, enlighten and seduce through music. I only wish she lived in the States somewhere so I could manage to hear her more often."*

Kurt Elling, April 2012

Leading her band with a quiet dignity, Nicolle's apparent ease at difficult, and varied improvisation, bring to mind the skills of singers like Betty Carter, Mel Torme or Ella Fitzgerald. But she sounds like none of those singers. Michelle Nicolle is a jazz singer in the true jazz tradition – a creative and masterful improviser with the technique to match any instrumentalist.

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## CD Releases:

1. Michelle's debut CD *Misterioso* (Newmarket, 1998) was warmly received by audiences and critics:  
".....formidable technique and a staggering range.....more interesting than most other jazz vocalists in the country."  
\*\*\* Rolling Stone
2. In May 2001 her second CD *After the Rain* (ABC/Universal) was released, and in September named a Finalists for the ARIA Awards Best Jazz Album:  
"This is the best album by an Australian jazz singer I have heard in more than a decade of reviewing music."  
*The Weekend Australian*
3. *Keep Your Heart Right* (Newmarket) is a live concert recording, released in Nov 2002.  
"Australian singer Michelle Nicolle solidifies her reputation as an inspiring singer of undoubted fortitude - one whose subtlety belies the difficulty of her work."  
Bill Donaldson *Cadence Magazine (USA)*  
"Her handful of originals are what stand out .. "Tell the Truth", for example, rings true as something from the jazz canon yet it's all hers."  
*Financial Review*
4. Specially commissioned for ABC Jazz (Universal) *The Crying Game*, released Nov 2003, it was a finalist in A.R.I.A Award (jazz album of 2004)  
"Nicolle's knack for uncovering surprises jars our imagination. Like the best artists, she reveals what we thought we knew in a clearer light. 2003 highlight." *The Age*
5. *What Kind of Fool* (Newmarket Music), Released in October 2005. This double disc not only features a fresh studio recording with a new Quartet line-up, but a full length DVD concert of MNQ Live in Korea.  
"Nicolle has killer qualities as a vocalist...a mix of uncanny precision in timing and phrasing, stretching and compressing words and notes to perfection, and an inventiveness that doesn't let up."  
*The Age*
6. *The Loveliest Night* (ABC Jazz), Released in March 2009. Another commissioned album for ABC Jazz, featuring the MN Quartet playing as they do live – stretching and kneading old songs to find something new.  
"Nicolle's warmth and an effortless flow of ideas makes the old sound new. This is a voice Australia should be proud of. 4.5 Stars"  
Kevin Jones, *Limelight*
7. *Mancini* (Newmarket). Released in Nov 2012. Following 2 sell-out concerts at the MRC Salon performing the music of Mancini, this CD came about due to popular demand.  
"Nicely audacious, full of wit, sometimes very tender. Hugely playful, vibrant, inventive, interactive, intimate, schlock free but warm hearted." Doug Spencer, *Radio National*
8. *A Flower is a Lovesome Thing* (ABC Jazz Digital and self release) Dec. 2016  
Winner of the 2017 The Bell Australian Jazz Award, for Vocal Album of the Year.  
"Caravan- the mood and sonic backdrop was a wide sky and an empty desert, brilliantly realised by guitarist Geoff Hughes, bassist Tom Lee and drummer Ronny Ferella. Such space clearly suits Nicolle, giving her room to build something."  
John Shand, *Sydney Morning Herald*

## Tours:

**Together for twenty years**, Michelle and her quartet are a rarity in today's jazz groups. An ensemble with a total contemporary and forward thinking approach, but at the same time steeped in the tradition of jazz, storytelling and the magic of the live performance.

MNQ career highlights include: South Korea, Finland, and Czech Republic Tour 2015, July 2012 **Asia Pacific Festival** (Russia), September 2009 performances at the prestigious **Tokyo Jazz Festival** and in 2005 **North Sea Jazz Festival** (Holland). Other international gigs and tours to date include 2007 **New Zealand, Turkey, Estonia, Finland, Singapore** and in 2004 a month-long tour throughout Asia; Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand. In August 2003 and 2006, the MNQ toured to all states & corners of Australia. Michelle performed 3 concerts in London in October 2016 and **JEN Conference**, New Orleans (USA) 2017, Seattle JazzVox Series 2017.

## Festival Performances include:

**North Sea Jazz Festival** (Holland), **Penang Island Jazz Festival, Jakjazz** (Indonesia), **Jazzkaar International Jazz Festival** (Estonia), **April Jazz International** (Finland), **Jarasum International** (Korea), **Java Jazz Festival** (Indonesia), **Christchurch International Jazz Festival** (NZ), **Thailand International Festival of Music & Dance, Wellington International** (NZ), New Caledonia, **Wangaratta International, Melbourne International**, Queensland Biennale, **Four Winds Festival**, Barossa Valley Vintage Festival, Fremantle Jazz, Eltham Jazz Festival, Stonnington Jazz, **Prague Jazz Festival** 2015 (Cz Republic), London 2016 and **JEN Conference**, New Orleans 2017.

and venues around Australia, Italy, Malaysia, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore & Turkey and UK: **Foundry 616, 505, Live at The Village, Starfish Club, Wine Banc, The Basement** (Sydney and Blue Mountains), **The Governor Hindmarsh** (Adelaide) **Perth Jazz Society, Brisbane Jazz Club, The Fontanonestate**, (Rome), **The Emporium** (Kuala Lumpur), **Once in a Blue Moon** (Seoul), **CHUNNYUN Jazz Club** (Seoul), **Shannon's** (Taipei), **Arts House, Southbridge Jazz Club** (Singapore), **Babylon Jazz Club** (Istanbul), Ankara Swissotel (Ankara), **The Schlot**, (Berlin), **Jazz Dock** and **Reduta Jazz Club** (Prague), **Koko** (Helsinki), **Spice Of Life, Bulls Head** (London), **Bedford Arms** (UK), **JazzVox** (Seattle, USA).

Michelle Nicolle performs regularly at Melbourne's, *Paris Cat, The Lido, Uptown*, and has held a 11 year residency at *The Brunswick Green*. Her other projects include *What Reason Trio* (with guitarist Stephen Magnusson) and MN Fretet (featuring 4 guitarists), as well as working freelance for various recording session work.

Michelle Nicolle holds a Bachelor of Education, an Associate Diploma of Jazz (University of Adelaide) and currently teaches vocal studies at **Monash University, Victorian College of the Arts, St Mary's College** (Adelaide) and is a regular vocal clinician around Australia.

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## Concert Reviews:

**"...but it was Michelle Nicolle who stood out, combining emotional honesty with an improviser's instinct..."** review of Melbourne International Festival Opening Concert, May 2013. *The Age*

"...all the band had to do was set up a golden glow of warmth, soft groove and space and Nicole was soaring to places you will be taken by few singers. In the world, I mean." SMH, 2016

**"Throughout the Michelle Nicolle Quartet's engaging performance they played with a laid-back rhythm with a focus on improvisation, and embraced the challenge of this approach unencumbered by past styles and more interested in focusing on the essence and uniqueness of the material at the moment..."**  
*Bangkok Post*

**"Thoroughly entertaining...the vocal pyrotechnics were breathtaking, yet they arrived only because the shape of the music demanded climatic exuberance".** *Evening Post*, New Zealand

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## Michelle Nicolle Quartet - **the Band**

### **Geoff Hughes** (guitar)

Originally from Wellington, **New Zealand**, Geoff is a highly accomplished musician. His practical knowledge of harmony and time is rare and much sought after - honing his craft whilst living and working throughout Europe in the 1980's.

During this time Geoff's gigs included **The North Holland Philharmonic**, and supporting jazz greats Michael Brecker, Dave Liebman, and Herb Ellis.

Since moving to Australia he's recorded a CD "*The Drop*" with Allan Browne, and brought his unique sound to the bands of **Joe Chindamo** and Christine Sullivan. He often plays sessions with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, and touring shows such as The Main Event.

Geoff is a core member of teaching staff at the Victorian College of the Arts, and in 2007 he completed his **Masters in Music Performance** at The University of Melbourne.

### **Tom Lee** (double bass)

Tom Lee completed the Bachelor of Music Performance at the VCA in 2002. While at the VCA he studied under bassists Geoff Kluge, Ben Robertson as well as Assistant Principal bassist for the MSO, Andrew Moon. He has also studied at the School of Improvised Music, located in New York, under bassist Drew Gress.

Tom has recorded with ensembles such as **Vada**, the **Gian Slater Project** and Contrabanda. He has performed at numerous festivals including the WOMADELAIDE, Wangaratta International, & the Melbourne International Jazz Festival.

### **Ronny Ferella** (drums)

Ferella's own band **Ishish**, for which he composes most of the material, has made quite an impact on the Australian scene - releasing four CDs. In July 2001 Ishish performed at the prestigious **Umbria Jazz Festival** in Italy, and **Pori Festival** (Finland).

Ferella leads other original improvised-based bands including **Mandala**, **Omlette** and in 2009 launched a CD label and website, **Downstream Music** which promotes improvised music made in Melbourne. In 1997 he was a finalist in National Jazz Award Drum Competition. He co-founded and directed **Half Bent Festival** - a musician-based organisation involved in presenting concerts and he teaches music at VCA, Monash University and The Song Room.

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Visit: [www.michellenicolle.com](http://www.michellenicolle.com) for sound grabs, photos & gig information

YouTube Channel: [www.youtube.com/channel/UCwuYjSFKBkMUjEdSUL7OEqw](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwuYjSFKBkMUjEdSUL7OEqw)