



Barefoot Diva goes with the flow

Cesaria Evora brings the music and charm of Cape Verde to Perth, writes **Ara Jansen**



It's a pity Cesaria Evora and I don't speak the same language. She has a wicked sense of humour and loves a good joke.

I've just asked whether she sings all the time. Nope. Not in the shower and not even when asked during an interview.

"I could do it if my love asked me and we were in bed. I would do it especially for him."

She pauses. "It's just a joke," Evora chortles. "I don't have a boyfriend — just many all over the world," and she laughs even more.

"See, she's not shy," interjects Juliet the translator.

"If you knew her, you would never think that."

Not shy and definitely young at heart, the delightful 66-year-old Evora says she gets her energy from a deep internal well which is replenished by singing.

Affectionately known as the Barefoot Diva because she sings without wearing shoes, Evora recently released her 10th album, Rogamar.

The fact that most of the world can't understand a word she sings is testament to the heartfelt flavour of her voice and the emotive music which accompanies her. It's exactly the same way she can love Nat King Cole, Ella Fitzgerald and Frank

Sinatra without knowing more than a few words of English.

Evora speaks — and sings — in the language of Cape Verde, a nation off the west coast of Africa once ruled by Portugal. The locals apparently call it the poor man's Portuguese because their Creole has little time for rules and grammar. There are less than a handful of scattered places on the African continent which understand what they're saying. Even the islands in the Verdean archipelago speak slightly differently.

The tiny republic has always been a port for foreigners and sailors. The traditional music in its bars is called morna, which mixes Portuguese fado and Brazilian saudade as well as having elements of Argentine tango and Angolan lament to create a kind of blues which sings of love, longing and emigration. Its instrumentation often includes clarinet, accordion, violin, piano, guitar, cavaquinho (a ukulele-type instrument) and in Evora's band, a saxophone.

There is no finer exponent of morna than Cesaria Evora, who has sold more than four million albums and become one of the darlings of the world music circuit.

"While morna seems sad, really it's not," she says. "Yes it has sad elements but it's music to listen to, to sing to and to dance to. It has a

flow."

The self-confessed crazy shopper with a passion for gold jewellery and a good manicure continues: "It doesn't mean we are sad people. We are very joyous. When the music is slow it can seem melancholic, especially if you are talking about separation or love but we also use the style of koladera in our music which has a lot of rhythm."

Though based in Cape Verde, Evora spends about half the year overseas and on the road performing

"I love touring very much. It's something in me I can't explain," she says. "The music is in me too so I have to sing. I come from a musical family. My father was a musician and my uncle was a great composer, I think the greatest of Cape Verde. My brother was a musician and I have music in my blood."

Though she wasn't discovered by the international world music set until she was almost 50, Evora has had a singing career spanning five decades in the bars of her home on the northern island of Mindelo. She thanks the foreign sailors who applauded her music and proved to her an international audience would appreciate her style of morna.

"I was so young when I started singing but I have always done it with great pleasure. It's my personality, plus I can't do anything



else other than sing.”

Evora isn't a songwriter and doesn't write any of her own material but is constantly sent songs to sing. If she likes a song, she records it and says there is nothing complicated about the process.

Cesaria Evora performs for the first time in WA at the Perth Concert Hall on February 28 and 29 as part of the Perth International Arts Festival. Tickets from BOCS outlets and perthfestival.com.au



Top of the morna: Cesaria Evora is steeped in the music lore of her country.