



Contralto in total control

CONCERT

Cesaria Evora
Perth Concert Hall
Review: William Yeoman

When, after a lively instrumental introduction, a barefoot Cesaria Evora shuffled unpretentiously on to the Perth Concert Hall stage, the response from the packed house was overwhelming. It was shaping up to be a good night.

At 66, Evora, a native of Sao Vicente in the Cape Verde islands, is very much one of world music's doyennes. Although she sings in a Creole that most of her fans don't understand, there's no mistaking the meaning communicated by her dark contralto and expansive musicality. Nor can you misinterpret the mix of melancholy and humour in the music itself.

Closely linked to Cape Verde's

national identity are two song and dance forms, the morna and coladeira. The former, based on the Portuguese Fado and Brazilian modinha, is usually minor-keyed and mournful; the latter, which has much in common with the beguine and calypso, is lighter and more up-tempo.

Both form the core of Evora's vast repertoire.

On this occasion, Evora was accompanied by a typical dance band that incorporated many instruments now associated with the morna and coladeira: cavaquinho (a small instrument halfway between a guitar and a mandolin), violin, piano, percussion, guitar and sax.

Her numbers included such favourites as Crepuscular Solidao, Sodade and the wonderful Africa Nossa (sung as a duet on Evora's 2006 album Rogamar with Senegalese singer Ismael Lo).

Here were stories of the pain and joys of love, of separation and nostalgia for home. Throughout, the audience laughed — maybe even cried — clapped and swayed in time to the music, obviously transported by Evora's evocative vocals and the band's driving rhythms and atmospheric melodies.

Unfortunately, as with all things in life, it had to end. Waving a pack of cigarettes in unambiguous fashion, Evora left as she had arrived — ordinary, humble and yet seemingly invested with great nobility.

But the thunderous applause guaranteed an encore. In fact, we got two: Besame mucho and Sangue de Beirona. Both sent the audience into a frenzy, and the standing ovation that followed a brief reprise of the last song seemed more than appropriate.

"Mi comprende?" Evora had asked earlier in the evening. Of course we do.