



family album

Ursula Yovich's life story comes with an eclectic soundtrack, writes **Chris Hook**

MANIFESTATIONS of a mixed heritage loom large in Ursula Yovich's life. The Darwin-born performer has a Serbian father and Aboriginal mother hailing from Arnhem Land but was raised mostly by her dad.

Then Yovich, an accomplished actress who has appeared in the films *Australia* and *Jindabyne* and is due on stage for Sydney Theatre Company later this year, married an Anglo-Celtic partner and the couple have a two-year-old daughter, Djarla.

And it was the little one who ignited the creative spark that became Yovich's one-woman cabaret show *Magpie Blues*, which is showing at the Opera House as part of next week's Message Sticks Festival.

Ostensibly a free indigenous film festival, the event has expanded to include panel discussions, a Babies Prom show, *Ngarrany Nhama Datiwuy Ngath I Man*, as well as *Magpie Blues*.

Her show involves song, story and a little bit of banter with the audience and was developed alongside Djarla's arrival in 2009.

"Cabaret was something I wanted to do for a while, although not necessarily about my life story or anything like that, I just wanted to do a cabaret," Yovich says.

"Then I started to think I wouldn't mind writing something about myself and my experiences growing up in Darwin in a mixed-heritage home. Then it started to get quite serious after I'd gotten pregnant with my daughter, that idea of passing on my story."

It's an upbeat piece.

Magpie Blues dwells on the early part

of her childhood and youth, with music being a key component.

There are several bluesey numbers written by Yovich herself, plus an '80s medley which includes the likes of Aretha Franklin, Tina Turner and Jimmy Barnes, but there are also songs by the Rolling Stones, Sting, Italian crooners and even a traditional song from The Philippines. Um, sorry?

"When my mother left, my dad married a Filipino lady so, I listened to a lot of music from The Philippines and I really got into it," Yovich explains.

"I don't really understand the language or what's being said, but I've always enjoyed listening to it."

Yovich has taken the show home to Darwin and had a pretty fun time with it.

"Unfortunately my mum couldn't make it," she says. "But my dad loved it and he was one of the main hecklers."

"I take on his character throughout the show and he has such a thick Serbian accent and people think [my impression] is not real but then they had the opportunity to actually hear it, so a lot of people said he stole the show."

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● **Message Sticks Festival, film screenings, The Playhouse, Sydney Opera House, Friday May 13-Sunday May 15, various times, free; Babies Proms: Ngarrany Nhama Datiwuy Ngath I Man, Utzon Room, Sydney Opera House, Friday-Sunday 10am, 11am and noon, \$19; Magpie Blues featuring Ursula Yovich, The Studio, Sydney Opera House, Friday-Saturday 8.15pm, Sunday 7.15pm, \$20-\$39, 9250 7777, svdneoperahouse.com**

of Yovich's life, beginning with her parents before she was born, then moving into

