



Shining Through

Rachael Leahcar

Rachael Leahcar came to national attention when she reached the grand final of the first Australian series of *The Voice*. Since then she has recorded three successful albums, as well continuing her work as an ambassador for the **Royal Society for the Blind**.



Your new album *Here Comes the Sun* is a collection of songs from the Beatles. Has the music of the Beatles always been an important part of your life?

I've always known of the Beatles but never realised how great they were until a few years ago. One day I just decided to play my mum's CDs of their greatest hits, and it opened my eyes to a whole new world. Their songs go from deep, meaningful ballads to fun, boppy party songs. They could write about anything and make it a hit. I really look up to them for that.

Can you tell us more about the particular songs you chose for the album, and whether they have a special meaning for you?

itunes.apple.com/au/album/here-comes-the-sun

I went through all of the Beatles songs on Wikipedia and picked out the ones I liked the most, and thought would suit my voice. I narrowed it down with the producers **Peter Dacy** and **David Cameron** and came up with a list of songs that gelled together. *Let It Be* in particular had a very special meaning because it was my online audition song for *The Voice*. I also recorded *Imagine* and *Blackbird* for the *Romantique* album but they didn't quite make it on there, so I'm glad they got the opportunity to be heard. The collection of tracks on *Here Comes the Sun* are some of my favourite songs to sing.

Was it a challenge to give your own personal interpretation of these songs, which are such classic and well-known works?

This was the most difficult part. I knew I needed to make them sound like my own, but my heart was telling me to stay true to what the Beatles intended as much as possible. In the end, I'm happy with the resulting balance. I tried to capture the emotion of each song and sing it as my own. Hopefully that shines through to the audience.

How is this album different from your earlier recordings?

Some of the songs on this album are completely out of my comfort zone, so I showed a side of my artistry that isn't normally on display. I also worked very closely with the producers to get the sound that I could hear in my head, and learn from their experience in the business, whereas in the past I've let others take the reins more in the production side.

You have said that *Here Comes the Sun* is the most raw of all your albums. Why is that? Was the recording process very different?

This album was the fastest album I've ever made! The recording time alone was just 3 days to record the 13 tracks with the intro and ending. It's raw because not only were the songs foreign for me vocally, but the recordings finished up sounding like live performances.

You also started studying speech pathology at university this year. What made you interested in this field?



I found speech pathology in year 12 when I was having some problems with my singing voice. I thought it was closely related to singing, so I applied for the course thinking I couldn't make a career out of music. I got accepted into this course, but I took a gap year to pursue music just in case I could make it work. In that year, *The Voice* happened and I also took the next year off to continue working on my music career. Since this was the last year I could defer, I decided to try to balance both music and uni life. I'm basically just doing it to learn some interesting things, not so much to enter into the profession at the end, because I'm hoping to be able to do music forever. The music industry is all I ever really want to work in. Nothing else could ever compare.



Rachael performing at Carols by Candlelight, 2013

How are you finding the experience of being at uni?

It's stressful at times, but fun too. Getting used to doing assignments again was hard, but when it's things you want to learn about it makes it a lot easier to absorb. People are also really nice and friendly.

Are you studying full-time? How do you plan to manage the demands study as well as music?

I'm only studying part-time and I'm so happy for it. I don't think I could've handled full-time uni, but I'm balancing it pretty well at the moment. If there is ever a conflict between uni and music, depending on what it is, music will usually be favoured because I can always go back to uni at any time.

And you now have a new RSB guide dog, Ella to help you – what difference has she made in your life?

Ella is my angel. She has made life and independence so much easier, and I couldn't imagine life without her now. My sight deteriorated so much that the cane just didn't cut it anymore, and with Ella I feel much more security and safety when I go out by myself. Even if I get lost, I'll be "safely lost" as they say. I just love her to pieces.

Can you tell us about the work you do as an ambassador for the Royal Society for the Blind?

I've been an ambassador for the *Royal Society for the Blind* since 2011, and I'm so proud to be a part of this wonderful organisation. As an ambassador, it's my

job to make sure everyone is aware of the work the RSB are doing and make appearances at the events to help the cause in any way I can. I've experienced the difference they can make, being a client of theirs, so it's a cause very close to my heart. The **RSB Guide Dog** service is just one of many services they can offer to blind and vision impaired people. Hopefully I can help them grow as an organisation as they've helped me grow as a person.



Rachael and Ella www.rsb.org.au

You have a profile on the “Can-Do-Musos” site (www.candomusos.com) – what does it mean to you to be a part of that?

I had never heard of *Can-Do-Musos* before, but I'm so grateful I found out when they asked to feature a profile for me on their site. There are so many touching, inspiring and beautiful stories, and to be amongst them is an honour. I was literally in tears reading them all. Unfortunately, the reality for a musician with a disability is that people judge them before they even start showing their skills, either too generously or too harshly. You wouldn't know it if they were on the radio, so it really is irrelevant in the music world. This site gives us the chance to share the story behind the artist, and give promotion to people who might not get it otherwise.

How has your life changed since appearing on *The Voice*?

Life is completely different! I was in year 12 before *The Voice*, wondering where life would take me. I'd tried out for shows like it before and never achieved much, so I was stunned at finishing third. Now I'm travelling all over Australia and the world performing and doing what I love to do best. I definitely wouldn't have had the same opportunities if it wasn't for *The Voice*.

Have you found it difficult to be so well-known publicly? Are there any drawbacks involved?

I am always flattered when people come up to me in the street and ask for a photo or an autograph. It's actually a really nice feeling for me to know that I'm making an impact big enough for people to do that. I feel like I've fit right in to the public eye, and it's where I'm supposed to be. There are no drawbacks that aren't worth overcoming for the rewards I'm given.



Rachael with her mentor Delta Goodrem on *The Voice*

You first made an impact on *The Voice* singing *La Vie en Rose*, by Edith Piaf. Do you have a special affinity for Edith Piaf as a singer?

I LOVE Edith Piaf! Her voice and soul will always be beautiful, no matter what era you are in. Such a classic.

You also write your own music. What would you like to achieve as a songwriter?

I hope for my songs to one day reach out to people. I want to have an impact and change lives through the music I write, like the people I've always admired. I think music is powerful and can make a gargantuan difference. There's something different about a

person complimenting your own writing compared to a cover; it's so much more personal.

Do you see yourself as a role model for young girls? What kind of influence would you like to have for your fans?

I would like to think I'm a role model especially to anyone struggling with a disability. I want to show everyone that when you love to do something, there should be almost nothing that stands in your way. While I understand my limits (I could never be a surgeon!), I also don't give up on something if I haven't tried it yet and I want to.



What advice would you give to a young person who wants to become a singer?

Work on your artistry as much as possible and work with other artists. Ask questions about the industry and learn all you can. If you are just starting out, get as much exposure as possible BUT it has to be the right kind of exposure. Trust your instincts. It's a hard, unpredictable road to go down, but it's always worth it if you're doing what you love.

What are the things in life that you find inspiring?

Music is the most inspiring thing in my life. If I listen to a song or hear about someone's experience that astounds me, then I want to achieve the same things and drive myself to do it. I also love hearing about other people's stories behind music. There are so

many extraordinary musicians who are still singing in bars and pubs, and what inspires me is that they sing for pennies but they still didn't give up. There was also a pianist I met in Italy from Cuba who told me he practises music for 17 hours a day. That's true dedication and passion.

**What are some of your interests outside of music?
You recently went to the OZ Comic-Con – are you interested in comics or science-fiction?**

I did! I dressed up as Sailor Mercury and people still recognised me, even with the blue hair. I do love sci-fi but I'm only new to the comic/anime scene. I went to AVCON last year and as a performer, it was fun to wear a cosplay and portray a character, like acting. And the atmosphere is really enthusiastic. I also love to ice skate, which many people would be surprised to hear, and swim when I can find the time between study and music.





What are some other things your fans might be surprised to know about you?

I started in the recording studio after I won a recording session in a competition when I was 12. After that, I entered every competition I could find and ended up winning a trip to Italy to sing on **RAI Uno** television in Rome. I actually made two albums before I was on *The Voice* as well, *Rachael's Repertoire* and *Rachael Leahcar*.

Are you working on another album at the moment? Could you tell us more about it?

I am, but it will be a very slow process. I want to make sure the songs are completely perfect, as I'm planning to make it mostly an original album. I'm also hoping there will be a few duets and collaborations on there. It's still in the planning process but I'm already excited about where it will lead.

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