

Connected with her soul

The challenge of the big, demanding US market beckons a Melbourne jazz singer, writes Carolyn Webb.

The singer Nina Ferro isn't a household name in mainstream Australia. But she's a star in jazz circles, and has big plans for the future.

Jazz legend Don Burrows describes Ferro as "extra special... She has a beautifully distinct sound in her voice; she sings with great feeling and has a great time-feel."

Singer Kate Ceberano says Ferro is "a generous and note-perfect performing artist". And Tony Bennett, whom Ferro supported on his 2000 Australian tour,

declared her "a fabulous performer with a knockout voice".

Ferro is about to headline two big concerts in Melbourne — the first tomorrow, with a 16-piece big band at St Kilda's National Theatre, and next month at Malvern Town Hall for the Melbourne International Jazz Festival.

Ferro released her fourth album, *Crazy Way of Lovin'*, in February. It was a breakthrough, because (alongside standards such as Ray Noble's *The Very Thought of You*, Lerner and Loewe's *On the Street Where You Live* and Stevie Wonder's *Send One Your Love*), Ferro wrote the album's title track. It was her first commercially released non-cover song.

The girl from Airport West is proud of the song, an upbeat, sexy, wistful lament at being addicted to a lover who "don't treat me all that nice". And she vows that her next album will comprise all, or almost all, original songs.

"The reason you sing other people's songs, at the beginning, is because you're still learning," she says. "You

haven't had those life experiences yourself. Then once you start having them, you want to express your own, rather than someone else's lyric, through someone else's eyes.

"For me, it's a natural progression to go from interpreting other people's songs to interpreting my own... I might lose people along the way, but ultimately, I've got to do what makes me happy, cos it makes me a better performer and a happier person and a better musician."

The song *Crazy Way of Lovin'* was written in eight hours one day last August. "I'd sort of played around with the chord progression the night before, and then the lyrics came to me in the morning — I just went 'aah!'. But there was one line that came to me the night before — 'Your love is bad for my health', the first line of the song — and I wrote it down and then I went to bed."

Ferro says performing *Crazy Way of Lovin'* at first was "like running around naked, in front of people. There's a certain sense of, 'oh my God, you know,

are they going to like it? Is it really sappy, is it really awful? Is it good?' I don't know. And then after a while you get to a point where you just go, 'I don't care any more. This is who I am'."

After 15 years as a professional singer, Ferro still loves what she does.

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How does she feel when she sings? "Like I'm connecting with a part of my soul. I think singers are healers, generally. We're communicators. I think we help people to feel things. A lot of people are moved in different ways.

"I can be singing the one song, and someone will come up to me and go, 'oh, that was great, I feel so happy', or 'wow, I'm really moved; I'm crying'. It's really quite amazing, the power that you

have, as a performer. So for me, jazz singing or any kind of singing is that connectedness that I feel within myself and with other people. It's a really powerful thing."

Ferro is going to the United States in July to promote her album and perform for the Riverwalk jazz program that is broadcast to 200 US radio stations.

She is thinking about moving there permanently. "I think I've done pretty much all I can here, in a lot of ways. If I don't try doing this, I'll regret it forever.

"I want to become more of an internationally known jazz performer and do some great festivals overseas. Possibly hook up with a record label that is more dedicated to jazz, like Blue Note. Something big."

Nina Ferro and her Big Band perform at 8pm on April 24 at the National Theatre, St Kilda. Tickets through Ticketek. Ferro and her 10-piece band also perform at 8pm on May 13, at Malvern Town Hall, followed by James Morrison and Joe Chindamo. Bookings at door or 8290 7000.