

# Leah Flanagan Biography

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If music is the food of love, then the recipe can be found in the life of singer Leah Flanagan. Born and raised in Darwin, the tropical capital of Australia's Northern Territory, her heritage combines the ingredients of the story telling of Ireland, the passion of Italy and the love of country of Aboriginal Australia.

Listening to Leah gives a taste of her life, and an invitation to a feast—of love and passion, sadness and joy.

“Living in the North has given me so many advantages, despite our distance from the mainstream music world,” says Leah.

“From Broome through Darwin and across to the Torres Strait, I grew up in an incredibly diverse community combining the cultures of my people, and that of Asia and Europe.

“As a kid, I knocked around with mates from all over the world whose families now call the Northern Territory home.

“It's been a real privilege that has always influenced my music.”

From high school busking to the Vancouver Olympics with the Black Arm Band, it is with a strong sense of that privilege Leah has taken her music to the rest of Australia—and the world.

That isolation from the larger music scene has made her success all the more remarkable. Leah worked with a number of local musicians and outfits from her late teens, resulting in the release of her first album, *Leah Flanagan Band* in 2007. Featuring local musos, it consolidated Leah on the local scene as well as exciting the interest of an increasing number of fans around the country. Songs such as “Out all night” and “Pretty Girls” set directions for her unique combination of what has been dubbed “Australian indigenous folk, country, and rock, with the occasional upbeat Caribbean-tinged ragtime song on the ukulele”.

Judged Best New Talent at the local Indigenous Music Awards, it was followed quickly by a breakthrough performance at the Byron Bay Bluesfest in 2008.

By this stage, Leah was an increasing favourite at music festivals around Australia, and a prelude to her second—enormously successful album, *Nirvana Nights*.

“2009 was a big year for me,” says Flanagan.

“I joined the Black Arm Band, got news I'd received a ‘Breakthrough’ grant (through the Cultural Ministers Council) and my Nana, who was a pivotal person in my life, passed away.

“It wasn't until early 2010 that I was able to focus and start writing again. I was almost forced into it really. My partner and I forgot to book our flights home from Broome, and ended up staying for a week waiting for the next flight home to Darwin.

“It was there that almost half the songs were written for *Nirvana Nights*. Shacked up at the Roebuck Bay Caravan Park, overlooking the ocean where we would throw hand lines in the

sea, drink wine and play guitar.”

The late 2010 release of *Nirvana Nights*, a tribute to a small, defiantly seedy bar in Darwin, was an artistic watershed, and coincided with an invitation to join what was described as the “collaboration of the year”—**Seven Songs to Leave Behind**—for the Melbourne International Arts Festival. This production saw her work with Internationally famed and acclaimed heavy weights such as Sinead O’Connor, Meshell Ndegeocello, Ricki Lee Jones and John Cale.

Most recently her uke-fused tropical stylings caught the attention of Jimmy Buffett who invited Leah to support him on his Australian Tour in January 2011.

Describing Leah, Buffett was to say:

*Leah Flanagan is a flash from the past, in the style of Maria Muldaur and Bonnie Raitt, as she dances and sings her way into your heart as she heads for what I believe will be a promising future. Who could not be charmed by a beautiful woman, strumming a lovely ukulele and singing her own thoughtful yet care free songs. I am a Leah Flanagan fan and encourage you to be one as well.*

Leah also appeared in 2011 in the final season of the much love ABC television show SPICKS and SPECKS alongside Jimeoin, John Williamson and Dave O’Neil. Later that year she featured on ROCKWIZ and performed a beautiful rendition on Elvis Costello’s “Shipbuilding” with ARIA Award winning composer and singer David Bridie of My Friend the Chocolate Cake fame.

Leah has just returned home—touring Canada and Europe—and taking a quick breather before she heads off again.

Being a self managed artist, she says there’s still a lot that she needs to do to become a successful business person, however, she manages her music career along with her day job which is promoting Aboriginal arts and crafts at the shopfront for the Aboriginal Bush Traders outlet in Darwin.

“It’s always hard to try and balance both worlds. All I want to do is just write more music, that’s my next plan. I’ve always been a fairly musical person, I have studied, I’ve got a degree in music and overall I’m a music appreciator. It just consumes me, it’s my everything, so it was a natural progression to become a musician,” explains Leah.