

# Marianne Riccio

*“Finding my voice, I only wish I had started younger”*

## Early life

Marianne was born in 1948 in the seaside village of Wallasey, UK. At the age of 15 she set sail to Australia with her family, sadly leaving her married sister behind. They were emigrating as ‘Ten Pound Poms’, arriving in Melbourne in January 1963. She can still vividly recall the change of seasons from the cold of home to the heat of a Melbourne Summer.

The family then moved to Adelaide in 1963 living in the Nissan Huts at the Smithfield Hostel. Marianne found 10 days work at the Royal Adelaide Exhibition, a daily 3 hour journey from her home at the hostel to Wayville, which included a 1km walk through sheep paddocks just to get to the train station to commence the journey.

This 3 hour journey led to love for Marianne for it was at the Royal Adelaide Exhibition she met her husband of 60 years. She laid eyes on a very handsome 22yo Italian immigrant who came to her coca-cola stand each day to buy a drink and he eventually got his English speaking friend to ask her out!

Marianne’s parents sought special permission for her to marry as a minor as she was 16 years and 4 months old. Marianne and Tony moved to a small flat in Tranmere welcoming their first daughter Nikki in April 1965. In August 1965 they bought their first home in Athelstone and their family thought it was too far away ‘in the mountains’, but Athelstone became their forever place. Building three homes where they grew their family to four children adding Julia, Paul and Steven.

## Creativity and Music

It was a chance meeting picking up a music CD for her daughter’s party that brought her into contact with a young woman, Juliarna Cleal, who would change Marianne’s life. Juliarna was working in the shop, singing like an angel so Marianne said to her ‘I’d like to sing like that’ and as it turned out Juliarna was a singing teacher. Marianne wanted to learn to sing two love songs to surprise her husband on their 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Marianne would meet with Juliarna for secret, private lessons and in the most Adelaide way, being so small where everyone knows everything, her husband happened to be working in Juliarna’s street so she had to go in disguise, wearing a straw hat so he didn’t recognise her! She eventually let out her secret as the passion of music took it’s hold on her! At the time her family thought she was having a midlife crisis at it was so out of character for her.

Marianne got up the courage to sing at the Arkaba Hotel in an open mic event ‘Search for a Singer’ run by Kate Lara which gave aspiring singers a chance to perform, it was a great learning tool. Her knees were shaking and her mouth stuck together, however Marianne enjoyed performing and it was through this experience she met people who would shape her future. She recorded 6 songs and gave it to a friend who had a program on a local radio station. It quite a surreal moment when she heard her voice on the radio. This led to a well-known piano player Barry Messner contacting to her sing with his band. She had further singing lessons with Wally Carr and it was Wally who recommended that she went to university to study. Marianne’s reaction was ‘What me? I’m too old’. She proved to herself that she wasn’t and at 59 years of age she studied Certificate 3 in Music at the University of Adelaide where she trained professionally and now sings a wide genre of music including Jazz, Pop, Broadway and Opera.

Marianne recalls there were challenges she overcame during her studies being a mature student, the fact she hadn't studied music at school and didn't even know what a treble clef was so felt that she was inadequate in the theory although she had her voice. When the theory became too much a fellow student young Deanna Carbone helped her make it through.

During her university studies she also attended a 6 week studio workshop on 'how to become real' run by David Griggs. There was a diverse group of people in the workshop and you weren't allowed to say why you were there or what you did. In one activity everyone had to stand for 5 minutes under a spotlight and not say a word, after 5 minutes everyone got a turn to guess what they did and all workshop participants wrote down 'an entertainer' for Marianne, which she found very empowering that people saw her that way. It was at the workshop she wrote and performed, supported by Deanna Carbone, her first song 'Can you feel the music?'. This was an incredibly powerful moment for Marianne as it cemented her love of creative arts in both writing and music.

After graduating, Marianne performed with a jazz band at various venues across Adelaide. Another challenge of the industry was felt at the then Hyatt, now Intercontinental Hotel atrium where her trio was to perform every Friday night for 3 months. It was amazing and one couple even booked Marianne to sing at their wedding having seen her perform there. However four weeks in Marianne received a call to say that their contract was ending as the management thought she was too old at age 65. Marianne discovered the band members remained and she was replaced by a younger singer. Marianne was a little devastated but her support network and her resilience meant she did not stop performing.

Marianne was later joined by her daughter Julia presenting a "Mama & Mia" tribute to ABBA show which was a lot of fun before Julia moved to Queensland.

She makes most of her costumes and is literally a whirl of colour and bling as she travels across Adelaide to perform. Marianne has performed in community clubs and residential care homes as she knows the power the music has for the residents particularly in reminiscing. She can recall performing for people who have experienced a stroke and can no longer talk however will move their mouth to music and sing.

Marianne's son in law Jim said "why don't you do something for children" so she created her first book 'Rainbow Land: a place where music lives' and 14 songs. The shows are based on a talking Piano who is very old and wise, she has performed at Fringe Festival, Carnevale and charity balls. The first show was in 2007 she was helped by Deanna Carbone, Nina Fantasia, Dr Rosarri Mbu and her talented granddaughter Brooke Measham and others taking the characters from the page to the stage! One Fringe reviewer quote said "Bright colours, sparkles and music, everything to keep a young audience enthralled, it's all there, throw in some happy music and a cast of fun characters and the show buzzes along". Her more recent show, thanks to the Marche Club and Cathy Papandrea and sponsors, included her grandchildren Brooke, Gemma, Tia, Jasmine, Claudia and Nicholas. Over the years during school holidays some of them would be involved in shows at Aged Care bringing lots of joy to the residents, she is so blessed.

During COVID restrictions in 2020 Marianne used her studio at home and free time to produce a CD 'Over the rainbow', a collection of her favourite songs and a DVD for residential care homes as the residents couldn't have live music for a few years.

Marianne credits her creative imagination for words and music back to her younger years when she would go to pictures every Saturday afternoon with her sister Patricia. They would be transported into another world as the silver screen brought to life musicals such as Calamity Jane. Her influencers came from great singers like Doris Day, Rosemary Clooney, Peggy Lee, Julie London, Ella, Shirley Bassey, Barbra Streisand, Elaine Paige and more recently Katherine Jenkins, Renee Fleming and Mirusia. Marianne is what's known as a cross over singer able to move from Jazz to Opera and everything in between.

She knows one of the challenges of creativity is the financial backing to bring the artforms to life, to produce shows and to write books. Despite this, it hasn't stopped Marianne from continuing to create.

Recent challenges and obstacles for Marianne have been a serious fall in 2021 suffering spinal fractures a crushed vertebrae losing 60% causing ongoing challenges with pain and mobility issues but she is not giving up any time soon! She is an advocate that music helps sooth the pain!

Marianne would like to thank her *parents who never got to see or hear her sing*, her daughters *Nikki and Julia and family*, dear friends Carol Parmiter, Kate Lara Villano, Nina Fantasia, (Angelo Fantasia deceased), Dr Rosarii Mbu, Deanna Carbone, Juliarna Cleal (Clark}, Helen Coulson for all their support. Suzanne Goodes for giving her first gig in aged care 20 years ago. Most of all her husband of 60 years Tony the Roadie for all his support and getting her on stage!

Marianne encourages all audience members to go up after a show and give something back to the performer by sharing your genuine appreciation and not assume they don't like to hear how you felt. Marianne has great joy every time she performs, and when she receives a standing ovation she always thinks how beautiful it is to share music with other people and says 'I don't want to give this up'.

***“Age is only a number and it’s never too late”***

