

BY SUSAN JARVIS

MICHAEL FIX SEES MUSIC AS ART – AS A WAY TO PAINT A PICTURE, EVOKE EMOTION AND CAPTURE A PLACE OR EXPERIENCE.

But this year he's become the subject of a different kind of art. Two of Australia's leading artists have painted Michael's portrait. "It's a strange experience seeing yourself on a wall, almost larger than life. It's a little bit confronting, but also very cool," Michael said.

Brisbane artist Roey Fitzpatrick's "Butcherbird" was inspired by a track of the same name from Michael's *Lines And Spaces* album, while Wollongong's Donald Keys has painted Michael standing in front of a geometric background to enter in the 2020 Archibald Prize.

It's amazing that Michael's had time to sit for even one portrait this year, given how much else he's done. He recently returned from an eleven-week tour of Europe, taking in Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria and the United Kingdom.

Prior to that, he toured Queensland for a month with his annual International Guitar Spectacular, this year featuring the talents of Italian YouTube sensation Luca Stricagnola and talented Queenslander Minnie Marks.

"Each year, the International Guitar Spectacular gives me a chance to bring an amazing young player from overseas, and to give a local artist an opportunity to reach new audiences. I love playing with different people each year, and they're always incredible players," Michael said.

Michael has now been touring Europe annually for 15 years, and is an extremely popular drawcard throughout Germany and in several other countries.

Over the past couple of years, he has been working with songstress Christine Collister, one of the UK's finest singers and interpreters, and the pair has just released their second album, *North & South*, recorded in Michael's Parklands Studio in Brisbane.

They spent three weeks touring England in October, and will return in September 2020. Meanwhile, they have an extended Australian tour planned for the first quarter of 2020,

kicking off at the Illawarra Folk Festival, then taking them to Victoria, the Central West, South Coast and North Coast of New South Wales, the area around Brisbane, including a couple of local shows, and then up the Queensland Coast.

"I spend a lot of time touring solo, so it's wonderful to be able to work with such a talented vocalist. When we perform together, it's like alchemy – it just creates magic," Michael said.

North & South features 12 remarkable tracks, including covers of songs such as *I'll Follow the Sun*, *Forever Autumn* and *Windmills of Your Mind*, and a version of Michael's *Butcherbird* with vocals, titled *Song of the Butcherbird*.

But Michael is currently focused on his other major recording project, *Cloudsurfing*, which showcases him at his best, as a completely solo artist, with no added instrumentation.

"Amazingly, given that I'm a solo performer, it's the first album I've recorded entirely solo – the only other instrument is my voice, on one track – a version of Harry Chapin's *Taxi*," Michael said.

Other album highlights include *The Balcony Bunch*, inspired by his sons (and featuring two of them on drums and percussion), the evocative *Cloudsurfing*, and several songs written during Michael's travels over the past 18 months – *Denali*, penned in Alaska, *Monet's Garden* and *Watercolours*, written after a trip to France last year, and *Waiting for Mr Wang*, inspired by an

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incident while Michael was touring China in 2018.

There's also a remarkable instrumental version of Jimmy Webb's *MacArthur Park*, and Michael has included *Nashville Express* as a tribute to the late Peter Posa and Phil Emmanuel, both of whom have passed away recently.

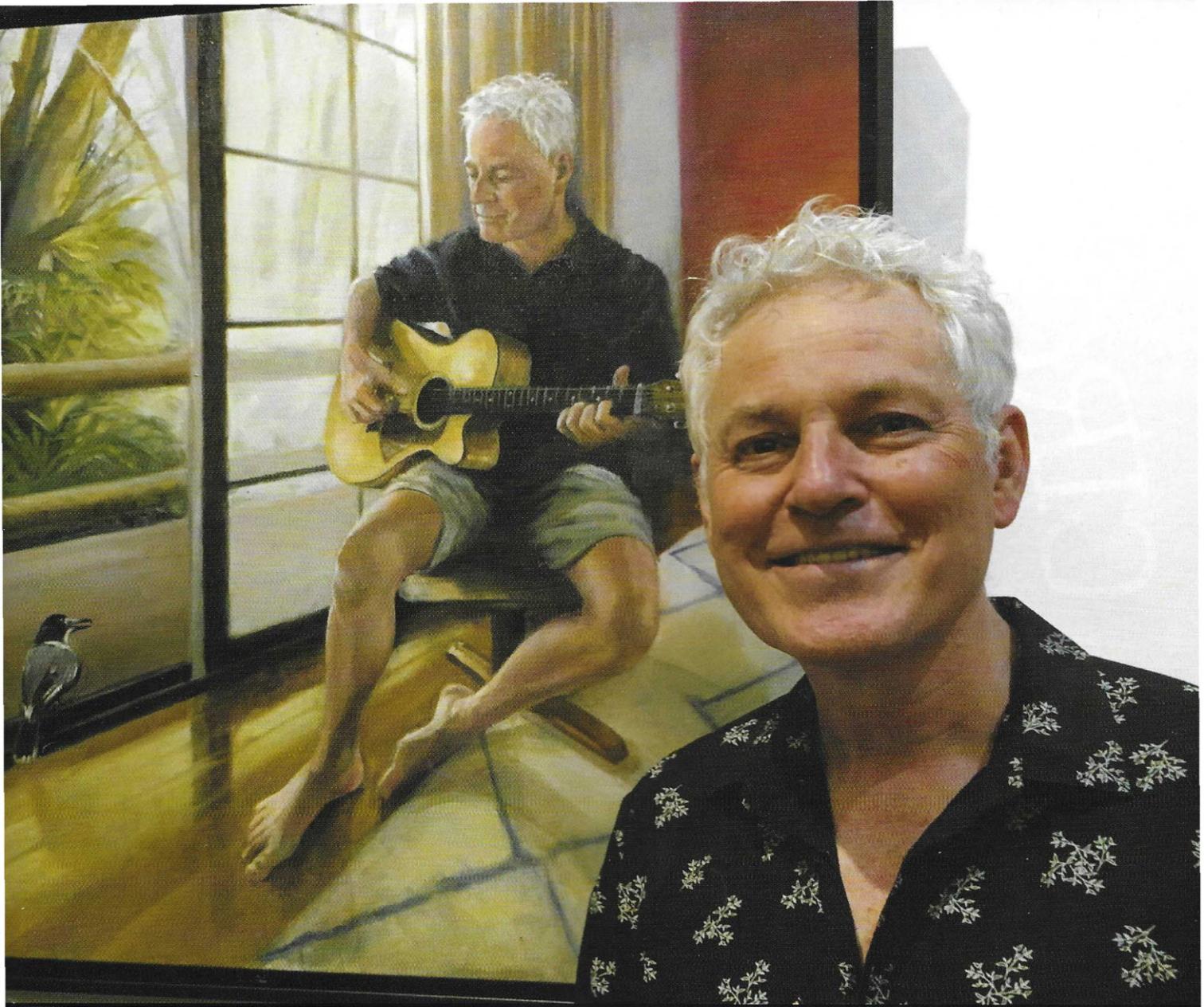
In between touring and recording his own albums, Michael has found time to write and record a DVD and songbook titled *Walking Bass Grooves*, which is being distributed in both Australia and Europe.

"It focuses on an important aspect of my playing style, which is using the thumb to play moving bass lines, and the fingers independently playing the melody," Michael said.

The book and DVD feature several of Michael's tracks, including *Thumb Thing*, *Cosmopolitan Blues*, *Opposites Attract* and *Canboulay*.

He has also been extremely busy at his Parklands Studio recording a number of other artists.

They include Graham Rodger, Sadie and Jay, Mark Cryle, Asleep at the Reel, Caroline Hammond, Gone



Molly, Open Season, Mystery Dogs, and Caroline Hammond.

"Recording and producing are a real passion for me – I love working with other artists, as producer and recording engineer, and often as a song doctor. It enables me to be creative in a whole different way," Michael said.

"I'm hoping to open the studio to other artists over the next year or so, and I'm looking forward to seeing what possibilities that will bring."

Michael's schedule won't be slowing down for the foreseeable future. He's a finalist in the instrumental section of the 2020 Golden Guitar Awards, and will start his Collister & Fix tour in January, continuing through until March.

His next Acoustic Guitar Spectacular kicks

off in July. This year it will feature newly crowned Acoustic Guitarist of the Year Christie Lenée from the United States and local talent Van Larkins.

Michael is also planning to present three guitar retreats, following success with guitar camps in Europe over the past couple of years.

"I'll be doing a Michael Fix Guitar Camp in Wollongong in March, then I have camps planned for Austria and Norway in August," Michael said.

"I love the immersive experience of a guitar retreat – everyone's working together, playing, learning, jamming, eating

and socialising. It is a really special experience, and it gives me a chance to pass on my knowledge, experience and skills to other players, including up and coming performers.

"As well as playing, I focus on performance and stagecraft, which often gets forgotten."

Michael will head back to Europe in August, touring Scandinavia after his guitar camps, then heading to Portugal, the United Kingdom and Germany. Youngest son Josh will join him to play percussion for the final leg of the tour, and there are plans for another duet album, following *Fix*, with older son Adrian a few years back.

I turned 60 this year, but I've realised it's just a number – I'm fit, healthy and more passionate than ever about performing, recording, producing and seizing every moment of life that I can," Michael said.

"I love travelling, producing, songwriting and playing, and I'm just so lucky to have the opportunity to do all of them and earn a living at the same time. I couldn't ask for more."