

I'd always had that little day job as a security blanket, while I did my music stuff at nights and weekends," she said.

"But a couple of years ago I found I kept being made redundant from my jobs, so I thought I'd give music a go full time – it seemed that I needed to take the hint. I think the universe was trying to tell me something, because suddenly it all fell into place. I've started my own music school, I've had a lot of success with the tracks from my last album, and I've built up my performing to the extent where there's a good business there. I'm even doing publicity and the like for other artists now.

"Even better, I've returned to study at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, which I love."

Merilyn's most recent album, *Extraordinary Daze*, was released in 2010, and featured a swag of perceptive and intelligent songs about a range of issues, from today's information overload (*Information Blues*) and her views on Australia's participation in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars (*The Unholy War*) to the autobiographical *Driven* and the heartfelt *When Will (My Heart Start Singing Again?)* through to the ethereal *If I Were A Bird*.

The songs on this album show that Merilyn is a talented and skilled songwriter, unafraid to tackle some of the big issues, and able to bring warmth, maturity and understanding to her subject matter.

"I really see myself first and foremost as a songwriter. I've been writing ever since I can remember. I used to write a lot of poetry as a child, and I've got a qualification in journalism and have even worked as a freelance writer," she said.

"My songs are a little different in that they explore things that matter in the world, as well as what's affecting me. They have

some substance, and I think that's what appeals to people."

"But once I put two and two together and realised I could combine the two things I really love – writing and performing – there was no other path for me than a career in music."

Teaching is also proving to be a satisfying addition to Merilyn's life. She now has a steady stream of students coming through her music school at Botany in Sydney's southern suburbs, ranging from talented six-year-olds to adults wanting to develop their musical skills.

"I find it really satisfying to watch an adult to realise their potential. But it's also a joy to work with some of the kids, who are incredibly focused," she said.

When she's not studying, writing and teaching, Merilyn's kept busy performing with her band and also as part of a duo. She works mainly around Sydney, and says she incorporates a lot of her original songs into her show.

"Play them often enough, and people get to know them – so they don't realise they're not covers!" she said.

She was recently named a finalist in four categories of the MusicOz Awards, and has numerous other awards nominations and wins under her belt. Her latest single is *Hey Dad*, which she recorded for Father's Day last year and released digitally on iTunes.

She also re-released *The Unholy War* for Anzac Day this year, to provide another perspective on Australians fighting abroad.

Merilyn has already written most of the songs for a new album, which she plans to record in a few months with **MATT FELL** and **MICHAEL CARPENTER**, who produced *Extraordinary Daze*. She hopes to release the album later in the year, then will hit the road, touring country areas of New South Wales and Victoria.

Taking the plunge into a full-time music career wasn't something **MERILYN STEELE** had ever considered – until fate stepped in, in the form of a succession of redundancies.



## WOMAN OF SUBSTANCE