

In for a Penny, in for a pound

This South Coast songstress is determined to hit the big time.

Penny Hartgerink has a name that is hard to forget, but not many people have yet heard of her. Even to music aficionados, Hartgerink is still relatively unknown in the mainstream industry.

But in March, Hartgerink had one of the fastest and top selling EPs on the independent music charts, and has performed with some of the biggest names in Australian music including the John Butler Trio, James Reyne and Mark Seymour.

"I guess I haven't been discovered yet," Hartgerink says. "I haven't got a record contract, and, to be honest, I haven't been able to get one, I have done what I have on my own."

"But now I can at least say that music is my career because it is the only thing I do and I can support myself with it."

Hartgerink, 21, has been performing since she was seven, and throughout her school years was a regular soloist in the NSW School Spectacular showcases, which bring together talented young performers.

She had solo spots in concerts at the Sydney Entertainment Centre and Opera House before she was 17 and sang the anthem at an Australia-New Zealand rugby league Test match in 2004.

And before she left school three years ago, she spent any spare time she had gigging.

"Until you hit the big, big time this is definitely not a glamorous industry to be in," she says.

"I moved to Byron Bay when I first started out and lived out of my van, eating baked beans and busking to try and crack it up there."

It is Byron Bay, not the US or the big British market, that has been Hartgerink's ultimate goal. About five years ago she got a play list from the Byron Bay Blues Festival and inked her name in the top billing.

"That's what I am working towards," she says.

After the success of her five-track EP earlier this year, her hard work seems to be paying off. Within four weeks of its release *Four Days* had climbed into the Australian Record Industry Association Top 50 singles chart.

"I didn't even know the EP was on the charts until a friend saw it listed in a music magazine," Hartgerink says.

Her blues/rock/folk combination not only hit a chord with the public but also with rock legend Clive Shakespeare, one of the founding members of the 1970s band Shambert and a respected record producer.

After he was

handed one of her demos, Shakespeare made an unscheduled visit to her home town of Kiama on the South Coast to hear one of her regular gigs.

"I was really taken aback by her demo. Apart from her voice, which is clear and has great pitch, her songs were really good as well," Shakespeare says.

"It is extremely difficult to get into music industry now," he adds. "There is so much product out there, so for Penny's album to even get on the charts let alone to number one is a great achievement."

"I don't think people realise that independent artists like John Butler and the Waifs have been doing the same thing as Penny for years before they got noticed. You just have to keep plugging away and maybe find a record company to help develop you."

Shakespeare is now helping Hartgerink with a 12-track CD, which she hopes to release by the end of the year.

"Penny has got to the stage where we have to take the next step, make the jump and spend something like \$20,000 to do a film clip to try and get a record company behind you," Shakespeare says.

Although she hasn't made all the money back on the EP, Hartgerink says the investment has been worth it, bringing her to the attention of respected artists and icons in the business such as Shakespeare and guitarist Jeff Mercer.

"I would like to think that I will one day get that big break, but some of the best singers in the world end up not going anywhere," she says.

"Of course I get disillusioned sometimes, and I know my success depends on how people respond to my music."

"But I can satisfy myself with the fact I have recognition from artists like Xavier Rudd and Clare Bowditch and John Butler."

"It gives me more credibility. If people hear that these guys

like what I do, I guess they are more likely to pick up one of my CDs and have a listen to me for themselves."

KEELI CAMBOURNE



Family tradition ... (clockwise from left) Christina Tulloch with her father Jay among the vines of the family vineyard in the Hunter Valley; Christina at the cellar door; Christina and Jay with some of the family's top wines.

Main photo: Brock Perks



A rare Hunter vintage

The Australian wine industry is a brutally competitive business dominated by multinational corporations. Which is why elfin-

featured Christina Tulloch has to be tough to thrive as general manager of family-owned Tulloch Wines, a Hunter Valley company reborn after coming close to being destroyed by corporate giants.

At one time the Tulloch family were the biggest wine producers in the region but the family business was sold in 1969, and went through a string of disastrous changes of direction, including being owned by Gilbey's, Castlemaine Tooheys and Southcorp, before being bought back by the Tullochs in 2001.

After 113 years the Tulloch name lives on with Christina as general manager and her twin brother Jock export manager based in Hong Kong.

Christina's wine industry veteran father Jay Tulloch remains the

Christina Tulloch is taking on the connoisseurs, corporations and chauvinists of the wine industry, writes WINSOR DOBBIN.

winemaker, but she is now making the business decisions, one of only a handful of women, alongside the likes of Michelle Nugan from Nugan Estate, Robyn Drayton at her eponymous winery and Vanya Cullen from Cullen Wines, running major wine businesses.

"There are a lot of very good women winemakers, but the Australian wine industry remains, in essence, a boys' club," Tulloch says.

"There are a lot of wankers in the wine industry, a lot of ego. Maybe that's why there aren't many women at the top. I don't know the answer - but the fact women buy well over 50 per cent

of the wine that is sold in Australia suggests it is wrong. Women who want to succeed have to learn how to play in a man's world."

Tulloch, 31, isn't afraid of speaking her mind - and has several ideas on how the Hunter can regain its position of pre-eminence with NSW wine drinkers.

In what may seem heresy to many Hunter producers, Tulloch says the region focuses too much on the wonderful but unfashionable semillons it makes, but often finds hard to sell.

"We also make wonderful chardonnay, shiraz and verdelho here, and in terms of tourism or the amount

of wine we sell we don't have a problem. In terms of how much semillon we sell, yes we do have a problem."

"The beauty of Australia is we produce very diverse wines out of different varieties at different price points. We shouldn't be embarrassed by that."

Tulloch is not ashamed to admit that their best-selling wine is a fruity verdelho, which costs just \$16.

Yet, she says, "among my peers I'm meant to feel embarrassed about making a wine that consumers love, but my peers don't."

"I'm as proud of our verdelho as I am of our \$50 Pokolbin Dry Red Shiraz. They are both distinctive Hunter Valley wines."

"Wine is meant to be fun - not something that is taken terribly seriously and means people stand around for hours discussing acid levels."

Tulloch turned her back on a career in marketing and journalism to follow her passion for wine and in 2007 was named as the Hunter's rising star.

"Coming back home and joining the family company gave me a great sense of

pride," she says. "It is immensely exciting. When the new cellar door was opening in 2003, my dad hadn't found anyone to run it, so I said I'd do it for a couple of months before being on my way."

"I loved it - and two weeks later a young Texan man walked in. He's now my husband, so the omens were good."

From cellar door manager she progressed to operations manager, brand and marketing manager and now general manager of a business producing about 40,000 cases of wine a year.

"I wanted to get a feel for all the areas of the business," she says, admitting the family history is both inspirational and daunting.

"You think, 'oh my God, what if it all falls apart on my watch,'" she adds, dissolving into giggles. "It's very much a motivating factor. It's your name on the brand you are trying to build. It's also very rewarding - and I know how hard it was for my father to see the family name under corporate ownership. That was

really devastating for him. This is a tremendous opportunity to repair the integrity of the Tulloch name working with my father."

"It's a wonderful thing that the family wineries are leading the way in the Hunter - which isn't the case in the rest of the country."

'There are a lot of wankers in the wine industry, a lot of ego.'

"We have such a proud, historic wine tradition in the Hunter and without the big guys it just lets us get on with what we do best."

Tulloch has little time for large multinational wine companies, claiming "they kill family businesses and kill fabulous old brands, so I think my great grandfather would be proud that I'm running the company today".

Tulloch divides her time between the winery and the company's offices in Sydney, where she lives with her husband Alex, and says she tries not to let wine dominate her life.

"I don't have a wine judges' palate," she says. "I have a consumers' palate and I think that is a strength. I'm in touch with what consumers want. I'm pretty sure you'll never find me in a white coat in the laboratory."

"I love to get involved when my Dad is blending or doing tastings, saying what I think will work. But I don't really like getting my hands dirty so I have no desire to be a hands-out winemaker."

The low-alcohol Tulloch Verscato, a

sweet verdelho made in a moscato style, was her brain child. The Tulloch family's involvement in wine began in 1895, when John Younie Tulloch, the grandson of Scottish immigrants, owned the Branxton General Store and accepted an unusual settlement for a debt owed to him - a 43-acre property in Pokolbin.

Tulloch took an immediate liking to the property and the two hectare of neglected shiraz vines it contained and undertook his first foray into viticulture and winemaking, which began the family tradition.

Christina says the best thing about her job is working with her father, who she talks to "10 to 12 times a day, no matter where I am".

"It's an unexpected bonus. In a work sense we are so complementary and are yet to have a really big blue. People say he'll be getting ready to retire now, but I still really need him. He does everything he wants to do, nothing he doesn't want to do and the stuff he likes to do he's teaching me how to do. He's not allowed to retire."