

Classical & Jazz

Edited by Jason Catlett
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Campbell
"combines
great strength
with incredible
beauty"

Fiona Campbell

Haunting Handel

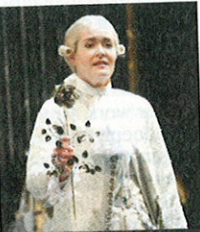
Fiona Campbell mans up to join the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra singing parts originally written for castrati. By Jason Catlett

Fiona Campbell has a voice the same way that Elle Macpherson has a body: towering but balanced, substantial yet supple, at once assertive and feminine. And the fact that Campbell can also act has brought her to the stage in acclaimed productions such as Pinchgut Opera's *L'Ormino* and *Idomeneo*. She has toured with international stars including Barbara Bonney and José Carreras. Her first solo album, *Love, Loss, Lust*, is due for release on the MSM label and iTunes.

This month Campbell tours with the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, singing Vivaldi and Handel favourites such as 'Lascia ch'io pianga', originally written for powerful castrato voices. ABO artistic director Paul Dyer generally casts male countertenors for these parts, such as the eminent Europeans Philippe Jaroussky and Andreas Scholl, or our own wonderful Tobias Cole. But he is trusting Campbell to bring both the "necessary grunt" and the appropriate dramatic emotions to these Baroque classics. "Fiona doesn't just have the vocal chops to sing this music well – she has the commanding presence required as well," Dyer says. "She is a stellar performer who can sell these intense and beautiful arias so that the audience will travel with her on the journey of the character. She combines great strength with incredible beauty. Her sound is unique."

Technically Campbell's voice is categorised as a lyric coloratura mezzo-soprano: mezzo meaning in the middle below a soprano but higher than a contralto, lyric indicating strong lower notes, and coloratura (colouring) showing vocal trapeze artistry. Mezzos are usually categorised as just one of these three types: few soloists match Campbell in both range and agility. Lyric mezzos are often cast into three operatic stereotypes: witches, bitches, and britches (aka trouser or pants roles). This mum from Perth says she loves the challenge of "getting the masculinity into the physicality" on stage. She was nominated for a Helpmann Award in 2009 for her testosterone-charged teenage Cherubino in Neil Armfield's now legendary 2002 *Marriage of Figaro*. "He's an overtly sexual character, rubbing himself up against ironing boards," she says. "I wanted to make it very real, to have a very genuine boy on stage. The biggest compliment I've ever received was when a doctor in the audience told me she had no idea I was a woman until she met me after the performance."

Haunting Handel City Recital Hall, Angel Place, 13–14, 18, 20–21 May, 7pm.
(www.brandenburg.com.au). \$24–\$140



Great 'pants' roles in opera

- 01 Mozart's *Nozze di Figaro* (Cherubino)
- 02 Handel's *Giulio Cesare* and *Xerxes* (Julius Caesar and Xerxes)
- 03 Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* (Mariandel/Octavian)
- 04 Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* (Romeo)