

## 20 QUESTIONS

# Fiona Campbell

Mezzo soprano, surfer and Oarsome Foursome fan.

**What drew you to music when you were young?**

I really don't know. It just resonated in my soul and I couldn't be without it.

**What's the key to captivating your audience?**

Dazzling dresses, fiery vocal technique and an "I can do anything" stage presence works pretty well. Although, when you show the audience your vulnerability, that's when they cry and I love making people cry!

**What would be your ultimate venue be?**

I'd love to sing anything at Covent Garden. But to sing Irene at Glyndebourne Festival Opera in Peter Sellars's production of *Theodora* would be a dream come true.

**Do your children appreciate your singing?**

That's the magical thing about kids – they don't "appreciate" things in that way, they just embrace it. We're always mucking around, singing things together, changing the lyrics. They did get spoilt with awesome lullabies at bedtime, though.

**What's the piece every self-respecting mezzo soprano should have in their repertoire?**

*Carmen*, of course! But if you want to separate the truly musical mezzos from the "mediocors", I'd ask to hear their rendition of Bach's *Erbarme dich*.

**Is there a trick to remembering lyrics?**

Just hard yakka. Practice, repetition and a literal translation if it's not in English, so that you understand every word and accurately connect the text to the rhythm. You have to be a girly swot, basically.

**Are you feeling the pressure as the first mezzo soprano to headline an Australian Brandenburg Orchestra concert in 21 years?**

Not until you mentioned it! Seriously, I can't wait. It's a real honour.

**Are your children musically inclined?**

They both have excellent musical intuition but I'm not forcing them into a career as professional musicians. I'd rather they were able to play the piano very well at office parties at their investment bank.

**Ever tempted to rock out at karaoke?**

Totally! You should hear my Amy Winehouse after a couple of vodkas.

**Did having children change your voice?**

Having children changed my life! I think there's a physical stamina that you develop after having children, so that even after practically no sleep and with a slight hint of "eau de baby vomit", you can get through a concert with aplomb.

**Have you ever lost your voice and, if so, how did you cope?**

Well, it's kind of like an athlete getting to the Olympics after years of training and then pulling a hammy – it can be devastating. I've come terrifyingly close on a couple of occasions. In the end, it's your mental strength that gets you through.

**Was there a moment when you realised you'd "made it" as a singer?**

When I was listed in the Qantas magazine as appearing on the classical listening channel. Oh, and singing with Jose Carreras.

**How well do you understand the languages you sing in?**

Every single word perfectly.

**Ever get star-struck?**

I did get star-struck in front of Olympic champions the Oarsome Foursome when I met them many years ago. They were rather awesome.



Photo: Steven Godbee

**How do you make a 300-year-old aria such as *Lascia ch'io pianga* fresh for audiences?**

The music may be hundreds of years old but the emotions are still relevant. Play the truth in the moment and it will always be fresh.

**Brandenburg's artistic director, Paul Dyer, seems to have an eye for good-looking talent – is this a requirement to work with him?**

Paul understands that a great concert is about the whole package: musicality, charisma and fabulous frocks!

**Do you join in when your friends sing *Happy Birthday*?**

Of course, but only with my day voice. I never say "stand aside people, La Campbell will now sing *Happy Birthday* for you", although that does sound pretty funny. Maybe I should try it.

**What's something most people wouldn't know about you?**

I've taken up surfing this year. I'm determined to look good in a bikini.

**What career would you have chosen had singing not worked out?**

Before music took over my life, I wanted to be a vet. Now, though, apart from a massive media career, I'd like to make music with more children, get them involved in the joy of it all.

**How much sparkle should an opera singer wear?**

You can never wear too much bling if you are an opera singer, especially if they are Chopard diamonds.

Interview by Megan Johnston

Fiona Campbell will sing with the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra in *Haunting Handel* at the City Recital Hall from May 13-21.