

"Singing is a powerful way of communicating with people as it reaches past the mind and into the spirit."

— To Be
is To Sing

ANNA HAWKINS

WORDS LIZ FRENCH / PHOTOS LOGAN DAVEY





WHEN UNO. VISITED ANNA HAWKINS SHE WAS SUFFERING WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS. A CASE OF THE FLU CAUGHT ON THE FLIGHT HOME FROM LONDON DEVELOPED INTO LARYNGITIS NECESSITATING 'VOCAL REST' UNTIL COMPLETELY CURED.

She wasn't finding it easy. "Singing is who I am," she says.

Singing is the reason for most of what Anna does and was the reason she had travelled across the world - to record an album in Poland and London. Anna met award winning Polish producer, Pawel Zarecki, when he realised his desire to come to New Zealand and was working with one of her friends. She had been aiming to go to the UK to record an album as there is a much stronger music production industry there due to the obviously larger market. But Pawel suggested she come to Poland. "He explained it was much more cost effective to do the pre production and record the orchestra there," she says. So she flew to Warsaw to produce the instrumental side of her album, then on to London to record the vocals and do what is 'make or break' in music recording, the mixing which involves getting the levels right so every component - voice, backing, every instrument - is synchronized in perfect pitch. That she secured the services of Ross Cullum, who has produced albums for the likes of Enya, and Mary-Jess Leaverland, a new British singing sensation, speaks volumes for Anna's talent.

If you have visions of a professional singer reclining in flight first class, then floating out of chauffeur driven cars into the foyers of beautiful hotels, wearing designer dresses and followed by fawning minions - think again. Anna arranged every aspect of her trip. She flew (economy) on her own to Poland and was joined by her husband, Simeon Clarke, a month later. They lived out of suitcases and stayed with friends for five months. Add the planning and rehearsal that precedes the recording of 14 tracks, five written by Anna herself, and it seems a massive undertaking for one person. The album will be released in 2013. It has yet to be named. "I've got a couple of ideas I'm deciding between," she says.



LEFT: Recording the strings in Bielsko Biala - South of Poland, August 2012
 ABOVE : Recording Vocals in London at River Studios in Battersea



"....I'm not an opera singer; neither am I a pop singer. I'm somewhere in between if you like."

BORN TO SING

At 24 Anna is at a pivotal point in a career that has seemed destined from birth. She grew up on a Waikato farm. Her parents say she sang before she spoke, and from a very young age loved performing for and interacting with an audience. When she was seven she started winning contests and talent quests all over the North Island. The family decision that she should take classical singing lessons opened up a whole new world. "My teacher, Avis Pennell, taught me the spirit of music," Anna says, "to sing with good technique but not at the expense of conveying the emotion of the song." Anna won the under 16 Lockwood Aria Competition twice running. Audience feedback encouraged a debut album, 'Russian Lullaby', which captured the uniquely mature voice of the then 14 year old. Her teenage years were a frantic combination of academia, sports and performing arts. She performed in choirs, with bands, in concerts, took lead roles in musical productions, and sang with orchestras and at events – Coca Cola Christmas in the Park at age 15.

Anna is a classically trained soprano whose singing style and range is described in the industry as 'crossover'. "While I have huge admiration for sopranos who sing opera and have opera songs in my repertoire I'm not an opera singer; neither am I a pop singer. I'm somewhere in between if you like."

Anna sings a mix of classical, contemporary and Celtic music, enjoying bringing these worlds together.

Her music has been described as inspirational, possessing the ability to reach the soul. "I don't sing just for singing's sake. I want to move something inside people. My goal is to connect with the audience and touch their hearts in some way," she says.

Her wide range is illustrated by a long list of performances including an anthem to a stadium of rugby supporters and playing Kim in 'Miss Saigon' to rapturous reviews. In 2011 she recorded an EP 'Credo' with members of the Auckland Philharmonic and Opus Orchestras. She also got married.

Anna Hawkins and Simeon Clarke share a farming background (he is from Cambridge), met at St Peters School in Cambridge when they were teenagers and have been together ever since. Between supporting his wife in her career Simeon is completing his business studies, and aims to be self employed. His admiration for Anna is obvious. "It may sound cheesy but I am extremely proud of her and thrilled to see her make a profession out of her passion. We both believe in following our dreams and aiming high."



ABOVE
Performing as Kim in Miss Saigon 2010
Coca Cola Christmas In The Park 2011
ASB Classical Sparks, Hagley Park Christchurch 2012



THE BUSINESS OF BEING ANNA HAWKINS

Anna has always had to make mature choices with her career in mind. No late nights if a concert is looming; no overindulging that might affect her voice quality. She eats healthily and keeps fit, a love of dancing enhancing her on stage carriage. Then there is all the work involved in being a self managed enterprise. While Anna now has a wide network of contacts and regular requests to perform she still initiates and arranges some appearances. She and her 18 year old sister, Lisa (guitarist and soulful vocalist), have just performed together in Cambridge. Anna selects her own gowns and does her own hair and makeup. She is very aware of the impact of personal presentation. "It is amazing how often people remark on how lovely I looked, instead of how wonderfully I sang," she laughs. She has just sung at the 'Lord of the Ring' charity boxing event, one of four December commitments. In January she appears at Concert in the Vines in Whitianga and the Auckland Seafood Festival, and in February performs with the Symphony Orchestra in Christchurch's Hagley Park under conductor Kenneth Young who has invited her back for the second time. A booking like this involves preparing her songs, and making herself performance perfect before she gets there, staying in the city for several days, and attending two rehearsals and a dress rehearsal. A full summer of singing does not leave much time for relaxing at Mount Maunganui beach where she and Simeon love living.

So far everything Anna has earned has been invested back into 'Anna Hawkins' and while she appreciates the support of family and friends, like the photographer who took her beautiful website photos on a remote beach up the coast from Waihi, she is conscious of taking her career to the next step.

She will be well towards achieving this goal if a recording contract follows the release of her latest album. But it will be up to her to get it noticed. "The recording industry is very risk averse," she explains. "Artists have to establish their own following first."

With talent like hers, proven appeal, and the drive to make her way in the entertainment industry the trappings of stardom can't be far away. It might make life easier, but it would not change this extremely grounded artist who simply loves to sing. ■

TOP TO BOTTOM

Anna and talented singer/songwriter sister Lisa Hawkins
Photo from Anna's website taken at Waihi Beach by
friend Carla van der Veen of Manawa Ridge
Anna and husband Simeon Clarke

