



Welcome to Natalie's Dream life

Opera singer Natalie Peluso is expecting her fourth child, but that hasn't slowed this Australian soprano down, writes **Fiona Purdon**

WHEN soprano Natalie Peluso steps on to the stage at QPAC on May 27, she will be hoping to bring "theatre audiences to music and music audiences to theatre".

She will perform her Queensland professional debut in the Queensland Symphony Orchestra's *Midsummer Night's Dream: A Festive Night of Shakespeare and Mendelssohn* where she will be joined by mezzo soprano Hayley Sugars, the University of Queensland Choir and actors including Rebecca Ritters (Hermia), Tama Matheson (Oberon) and Ian McFadyen (Egeus).

"It is beautiful music. People will get to hear *The Wedding March* not played in the church," she says.

"Shakespeare will always appeal to audiences. As a playwright he understood story-telling. He understood what people wanted to feel and how to make that happen.

"Opera is a fantastic medium which can heighten the story with sublime music."

Appearing on stage is something the 36-year-old has done only on rare occasions in the past 12 years.

After singing on London's famous Covent Garden stage, alongside some of the world's biggest stars, she decided to start a family. She swapped Britain for Queensland's warmth, sunshine and outdoor lifestyle to raise her children – Ava, 7, Sophia, 3, and Dante, 15 months.

Peluso, who is 20 weeks pregnant with her fourth child, is balancing family life with singing assignments including *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

She has chosen to ignore the common perception that an international opera career and motherhood don't mix. Legendary Dame Joan Sutherland and present soprano star Cheryl Barker are exceptions.

"No one talks about it much ... but children don't fit in," she says.

"There is this stigma ... that you are not dedicated to your craft, you are not serious about performing.

"Opera singing demands a lot of sacrifice. It's a very lonely profession. You are required to travel so much. I wish there were more mums in opera."

Victorian-born Peluso has no regrets about taking a family break because she feels fortunate to have already experienced so many opportunities.

She believes motherhood has made her a better singer and performer.

"You become less self-centred," she says.

"(In opera) it's so much about the ego. When you've had a profound life change, it brings something new and richer to your work."

A few weeks after giving birth to Ava, she performed the lead role of Susanna in Neil Armfield's *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Sydney Opera House in 2004.

Singing the *Midsummer Night's Dream* music in Brisbane will not be the first time Peluso has done it.

She sang it while she studied on scholarship at London's Guildhall School of Music and Drama after winning the Australian Singing Competition and the Marianne Mathy Award in 1995.

And while she didn't have her first singing lesson until she was 15, she hadn't even finished her course at the

Victorian College of the Arts before she won the role of Constance in the Welsh National Opera's presentation of *The Carmelites* in 1999.

She worked under Phyllida Lloyd, best known as the director of the West End opening production and the film version of the blockbuster musical *Mamma Mia!*

"I had coffee with her at the theatre. I was so nervous but we got on so well that we talked for two hours," she says.

"It was a massive significant role in a major production, so I was over the moon and insanely excited."

Peluso stayed with the Welsh National Opera, where she met her husband Antonio, until 2004.

She made her Covent Garden debut as Zerlina in the Royal Opera House's production of *Don Giovanni* in 2002.

Peluso believes she has another 25 years to continue her singing career but has also pursued other artistic avenues, including co-writing a film screenplay titled *Undressing Figaro*.

"The beauty of opera singing is that it's like a wine, your voice usually improves with age," she says.

"I feel I can have my cake with three beautiful children, a husband I adore, and many years ahead of me for my singing."

Midsummer Night's Dream: A Festive Night of Shakespeare and Mendelssohn, May 27, QPAC. Phone qtix on 136 246 or visit www.qtix.com.au

Peluso will also perform *Illuminations* with the Camerata of St John's at the Conservatorium Theatre.



**HIGH
NOTE:**
Singer
Natalie
Peluso at
home.

Picture:
Campbell
Scott