

LOVE HER WAY

THE OTHER HALF

by Jennifer Hansen

INTERVIEWS WITH THE PARTNERS
OF SUCCESSFUL AUSTRALIANS



LISA CAMPBELL, WIFE OF SINGER DAVID

PRODUCER and actor Lisa Campbell came to Australia with the National Theatre Company four years ago to escape an English winter and put a failed romance behind her. What she wasn't expecting was to find her future husband three weeks before she was due to return home.

Singer David Campbell has wowed audiences worldwide, but just before he met Lisa he had been battling a career slump. Once they connected it was like pieces of a jigsaw found the right spots — love blossomed and both their careers soared. Now they are also celebrating the arrival of their son Leo.

JYou're a producer and actress?
LI started off as an actress and that's what I was doing when I met Campbell when I was in Australia. I call him Campbell because there were too many Davids around when we first met.

JAnd why did you come here to live?
LBecause of him. I came out here with a play called *An Inspector Calls*. It was in 2006 and after I'd had a relationship that hadn't worked out in the UK and my agent called me and said, "Look, you've never been an understudy but you might be interested in this, because you get three months in Australia". And I thought this is perfect because I can go and clear my head, and it was summer here so it was gorgeous. We did six weeks in Sydney and six weeks in Melbourne. While we were in Melbourne some people from my cast were obsessed with *Kath and Kim*. Magda Szubanski was in the musical *Spelling Bee* at the MTC. So they went along and saw it and thought, "This is ridiculous, she's got to be our best friend", so they very pompously went backstage and said, "We're from the National Theatre in England and we want to be your friend". And she said yes. They all became very close very quickly. She invited them to their "Thirsty Thursday" evening and so they brought me along as well. And I walked in there and this very handsome, strapping, very Australian larrikin chap offered me a beer — and that was Campbell.

JA beer?
LYes. The first thing he said to me was, "Do you want a Becks or a Heineken?" I chose a Becks, and it piqued his interest. It was the correct answer. And Magda was really instrumental in getting us together. She was setting us up the whole time. If we went to dinner, she made sure we sat next to each other. And we hitched up straight away. Then after two weeks that was it, my Melbourne season was over and I had to go up to Brisbane. And he came too.

JDid you feel, that first night, there was a special connection?
LYes, yes. That was on a Thursday and then I saw him the following

Monday and from then on, we've been together ever since. An immediate romance. When you know, you know. I can remember saying when I had to leave Australia, "I don't know what's going to happen, I should just be happy for the time we've had, this fling", and Magda said, "I will not hear this 'I will take the crumbs off love's table' bull--- from you. You deserve this and this is the right thing."

JHow long did you have together before you had to return to the UK?
LOnly three weeks. So we didn't really know what the deal was going to be. But then on the way home he called me when I'd only made it to Singapore and said, "Right, this is ridiculous. I can't live without you. I can't go to London because I'm recording an album right now but I'd like you to come to Australia." So I went home and sold my car and put all my stuff in storage.

JThat's a huge gamble isn't it, after only three weeks?
LIn hindsight, it's crazy. But I did feel confident it was the right decision. But the only way I could think of it was, "Well, this is an adventure. If it doesn't work out, I'll just come back". I didn't really have anything to lose at that point.

JWhat did your friends and family say?
LWell actually my Mum died when I was young, so it's just me and my Dad. When I arrived in London, Dad picked me up at the airport and I'd told him on the phone about this chap, and the first thing he said to me was, "So when do you move?"

JHe knows you well.
LYes, he knows me too well. (laughs) And I said, "Give us about six weeks." And the second question was, "Oh well, what does his father do?" I swear to God, that was the second thing he said. And I had to say, keep in mind my father's an accountant by trade, that he's the opposite to you. And explain from there. Because Campbell didn't initially tell me anything about Jimmy (Jimmy Barnes). Because Jimmy had never released anything in the UK. I had no idea. I'd never heard of him. And Campbell



really played it down. So when he said, "Oh my Dad's a rocker", I just thought, oh well, maybe he had a chance hit song once ... I left the apartment where I was staying in Melbourne and there was a huge billboard with Jimmy's face on it, and then it all sort of fell into place.

JWhen did you first hear David perform?
LWell, unbeknownst to me, I had CDs with him on because I was a very big musical theatre fan, particularly as a teenager. And so I had cast albums that he'd done when he was in New York and the other was a concert he did called *Hey, Mr Producer*. One thing I'm totally impressed by, as well as being totally in love with Campbell, and I know that sounds schmaltzy but it's true, but I'm also a really big fan. He is really such a good performer and I fall in love with him all over again when I see him perform.

JSo did you come back to Australia with a job lined up?
LNo, I had no idea how it was all going to pan out. But I was very keen to remain independent. At first I said I'll just get my own apartment in Sydney, I'm not going to rely on you. And I worked in jobs like managing a bean bag shop for a while, and the obligatory out-of-work-actors Cellarmasters call centre job, but I was very determined that I wasn't going to live off him.

JHow long before you moved in together?
LSix weeks. And then a year and three months later, he proposed. And I love him more today than I've ever loved him before, and that continues.

JWere you looking forward to having children?
LYes, although it happened more quickly than we expected. We were only married nine months before I became pregnant.

JAnd how are you finding motherhood?
LI love it. I love him (Leo) so much. Everyone tells you that being a parent is going to be the most incredible experience and you will love this little being so much, but there's nothing that can compare to it. He's just incredible.

We're very lucky with Leo. He's pretty logical. If he cries, there's a reason for it and it's been something we can address and he stops crying. I can't wait to see him grow up, although on one hand I don't want him to, but I'm so excited to see who he's going to become.

JDo you want him to be a singer like his father?
LIf he wants to, of course. But those are two sets of shoes that are going to be hard to fill. I mean, I've seen how hard it is for Campbell growing up as Barsney's boy and to have two sets of shoes to fill could be a bit daunting.

JHow is David as a dad?
LHe's wonderful. He's very emotional. He cries. All the time. But he's great. He's really manned up — risen to the challenge. Not that I didn't expect him to. But when we first got together we ate too much and drank too much, and we both put on a lot of weight. But when I got pregnant he had this steel focus, that he didn't want to be a fat dad. He wanted to be the best he could be for his son. So he's at the gym five times a week and he's lost 18 kilos.

JHow did it happen that you're producing a cabaret show (*Britney Spears: The Cabaret*) and Leo's only four months old?
LNot by design. The show was set in place before I got pregnant. There are things we do annually and we always do a cabaret show.

JThis is your production company, called ... ?
LLuckiest Productions. The name comes from the Ben Folds song called *The Luckiest*. The words are, "I don't get many things right the first time, in fact I'm told that a lot, but all the wrong turns and stumbles and falls have brought me here, so I know I'm the luckiest". And that's exactly how it felt for Campbell and I. We'd had failed relationships or done wrong things with our careers, but as soon as we came together everything seemed to work out. It's just good fortune.

JWhat made you decide to start up a production company?
LCampbell had a few years in the wilderness after *Shout*, which was a huge success. He made a pop album that still sits on a shelf at Sony. Then he decided he was going to record a swing album. And he started recording that the day after we had our first date. So I've been there for the duration. He started doing more shows, which was good, but he wanted more control. And it seemed to work out better if we were looking at it together. I had no experience whatsoever as a producer. For Campbell's first tour we put all our money behind it, and it was successful. We were very fortunate. I remember (producer) Amanda Pellman saying to me, "So who are your investors?" And I very proudly said, "Oh no, we're doing

* *Britney Spears: The Cabaret* is at Chapel off Chapel in Prahran until October 24.

* David Campbell's new DVD, *The Broadway Show Live in Australia*, will be released on October 29.