

Katherine Jenkins, 32, talks to Victoria Young about choosing roast dinners over red carpets, how her mother knows best – and why her scariest gig will be singing at her sister's wedding

I was four the first time I performed in public. There was a talent show at school, and I couldn't wait to tell my mum. She taught me the song *Going Down The Garden To Eat Worms*, and the actions. I remember going on the stage and it felt like the headmaster was introducing me forever. I was thinking, "I just want to sing!" so I kept interrupting him, which made the audience laugh. Eventually I sang, and that was the moment the seed was planted. I thought, "I would like to do a bit more of this."

Music was the thing that I found always made me so happy. When I was younger I didn't think, "I want to be famous." It has always been about a love of singing more than anything else.

I joined the church choir and started singing in competitions. Then I went to London to study at the Royal Academy of Music, and after four years I made a demo, then when I was 22, I was signed by Universal. I was very lucky.

My mum has been brilliant because she understood that it was a passion. My earliest memories are of her being there for me, but not in a "pushy mum" kind of a way. She's always been cautious and has never been carried away by the showbiz side of it all.

Mum was the main breadwinner because my dad took early retirement, so they switched roles when I was four. I remember my mum being not necessarily ambitious but very hard-working, with a good work ethic. She definitely passed that on to us. Her advice to me and my sister Laura – who's two years younger than me – was to work hard in school. She said we could be whatever we wanted to be, and that, as women, we should be independent and not rely on anybody else financially.

Laura and I have gone on to do completely different things. She works for the charity Macmillan, which she loves. Neither of us are afraid of a bit of hard work, and we are both a little bit ambitious in that we want to do things that make us happy.

I trained as a teacher so I could teach if the singing didn't work. I did teach singing for a while, and for the first year after I got my record contract I was still teaching because I could hear my mum's voice saying, "Well you don't know how the record is going to work out." Where we come from, you don't hear stories of somebody making it in the music business.

I can sing to 10,000 people at London's O2 Arena and the only opinion that really matters is from Mum because she will give me the honest answer. If I've not sung well she will tell me. And so if my mum says, "You were amazing," then that's a massive compliment. I feel more than ever that I need that in my life now because when you're in the public eye, you can be surrounded by a lot of people who tell you what you want to hear.

Family is hugely important. I love that we're all so close. My aunts have always been around. Growing up, I watched my mum's relationship with her sisters – they were her best friends, and now Laura is one of my best friends. We are quite a strong female family – all my cousins are girls as well so we're virtually all women apart from a couple of guys. There is a definite "girl power" message in our family – the girls are definitely in charge.

I never get nervous when I'm performing. Unless I'm doing something out of my comfort zone, like *Dancing With The Stars*, which was so out of my comfort zone, I was a nervous wreck. But when I'm singing I really enjoy that connection with the audience. Although I often think, "Will anybody come?"

My dad passed away when I was 15. It gave me an insight that life is too short not to go for what you want. You are responsible for making things happen in your own life – and I know that my dad would have really liked me to have pursued my dreams.

My dad was an amazing man. He was very funny. He was older than my mum by 25 years, and he was worldly wise, calm and very loving. If I could meet a man like that it would be perfect! He'd drive me after school to singing, piano and dancing lessons, and he filled me with confidence and made me laugh. We'd joke that I'd be on *This Is Your Life*. Whether he really believed it, I'm not sure. But I feel that somebody is helping me on this path. Whether it's God or my dad – somebody is definitely keeping an eye on me.

Obviously, when you lose your father there is a negative side. At 15, I struggled for a little bit but I am honouring Dad all the time. >>

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strong
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MATERNAL BOND

Katherine's mother, Susan Jenkins, 62, lives in Wales.

I think I realised that Katherine had something really special when she was about ten. We went to hear her sing with the Cathedral singers and she was performing the *Magnificat*, a soprano solo. It was just stunning – really beautiful – and so moving.

I used to worry about her, and get nervous for her. When your child is up there singing in a competition, you don't want them to be disappointed. She used to be so hard on herself if she made a mistake. But I'm not nervous now because I know that she'll never let herself down, and she seems to have the confidence to try new stuff and carry it off.

Katherine always comes home for Christmas. We go to church on Christmas Eve and I think some people come into the church to see Katherine, but still we always go. She'd like to come home more often and she works too hard, really – that's the only regret I have, that she doesn't make more time to come home. We tend to speak once or twice a week. And she got me an iPad for Christmas so we can talk on FaceTime, which makes a big difference.

My husband Selwyn died in 1986, and it was just awful. My family helped but I often look back and wonder how well I looked after my girls when I was going through all that grief, but we've talked about it since and, somehow, we got through it.

It's sad that Selwyn isn't here to share in our daughters' success. Especially now I'm going to give Laura away at the wedding. I'm glad she's asked me to do it – but it is poignant. He would have been amazed at how things have panned out. The last time he came to see Katherine sing it was at a local talent show at the Grand Theatre in Swansea when she was 15.

Laura has never been jealous of Katherine, which I always thought was lovely. She is very happy and calm, and she has a lovely fiancé – she knows where she's going all right. She has enjoyed Katherine's success and has never resented it – and we have all benefited.

I am very, very proud of Katherine. And we do all these lovely things, like going to the Royal Albert Hall to a Christmas show; I've been to the Royal Box at Wimbledon twice; and garden parties at Buckingham Palace, plus lots of concerts. I've been out to Italy with her to hear Plácido Domingo perform, and Laura and I went to LA last year to watch her in *Dancing With The Stars*. I can't believe it sometimes and have to pinch myself.

Obviously I'd love her to meet somebody nice to marry, and to have children. I hope she does. That's what I want – for her to have a normal life, away from all the celebrity stuff, and to recognise the time has come to stop working so hard.

Katherine Jenkins and Il Divo's co-headline UK tour starts on 4 April in Nottingham. For tickets, go to gigsandtours.com. w&h



“I can't wait to be a mum, and if I am, I think it's a gift, and I want to enjoy it”

Every album has his name on it, and every award is dedicated to him. Last week, I went with Macmillan to open a new cancer unit, and Prince Charles was there. One of the first things he said to me was, “I didn't realise that your ‘Pa’ had died of cancer.” I told Mum and she loved the fact that Prince Charles had mentioned Dad.

I have changed over the past ten years, but it may be just maturity rather than fame. I know who I am more, and I'm more confident with my decisions and about trusting my gut instinct. But my friends and my values are still the same. Kristy is my best friend from school; Katie and Jane are my friends from the National School in Wales. Then there's Kelly, and Holly, who's a friend from when I taught her singing.

My ideal girls' night is everyone at my house getting ready to go out. Then going out for a few drinks and a cheesy dance. Girls' nights are definitely the best, although they're rare because I can't really go out when I'm performing because I can't drink. I have to rest my voice too, and I don't talk at all when I'm performing. I'm on tour with Il Divo, and mostly I won't

speak between the shows. It has become like second nature. It's the best way to heal my voice and if people make the effort to come and see me sing, I don't want to let them down.

I'm a typical Cancerian so I'm a nest builder. I live in London and I enjoy my home being a social hub. Yesterday, I cooked a roast dinner and had ten people round because my mum was staying. I would choose a night like that over a red carpet event any day.

My favourite room is the kitchen. I love interior design but I like my house to feel cosy and relaxed. My kitchen is very much an entertainment space. There's one long island, so people can sit around and talk while I'm cooking.

My sister and I see each other as much as we can. I'll be singing at her wedding this month. I didn't offer because I thought she'd want a day off from me singing! When they asked I was surprised. It will be such an honour. I think it's going to be a morning of tears – especially with my dad not being here. I'm going to have to keep it together because singing and crying do not mix.

Last year was crazy. It started off in a personal sense in a very devastating way when Gethin [Jones, TV presenter] and I broke up, and I didn't know how it was going to work out. Then *Dancing With The Stars* happened in America, and then singing at the Olympics and the Jubilee. It was an exciting year, but I didn't stop working and this year I need to have more balance.

Public break-ups are difficult. Going through that is devastating anyway but when it's “out there”, people feel free to comment. That's weird, and it makes it more difficult. I don't talk about my relationships ever and I will never disclose what happened, but it always amazes me how people think they know what went on, then judge you on it, when the reality couldn't be more different.

My latest hobby is training for the London Marathon in April. I'm raising money for Macmillan. After *Dancing With The Stars*, my fitness level was crazily high, so I decided to make the most of it, and I did my first run in October.

I love shopping but I never get time to do it. I love mixing high street with designer stuff. I like Reiss, Whistles, Topshop and French Connection, and designers like Roland Mouret and Mary Katrantzou. I just love clothes generally.

PHOTOGRAPHS: TREVOR LEIGHTON; STYLING: ARABELLA BOYCE AT RED REPRESENTS; HAIR: PETER LUX AT FRANK AGENCY; USING BUMBLE & BUMBLE; MAKE-UP: CHARLOTTE REID AT ONE REPRESENTS; USING SKINCARE BY DARPHIN; KATHERINE WEARS: OPENING SPREAD: DRESS: MARY KATRANTZOU AT FEATHERSFASHION.COM; SHOES: LK BENNETT; EARRINGS: CORALIALETS.COM; DIAMOND BRACELETS, LUCIECAMPBELL.COM; KATHERINE WEARS THIS PAGE: DRESS: TED BAKER; DIAMOND EARRINGS AND BRACELETS, LUCIECAMPBELL.COM; WATCH: SILK BRACELET, CORALIALETS.COM; SUSAN WEARS: JUMPER, CUSTOMMADE, (020) 7486 0486; TROUSERS, JAEGER; EARRINGS AND NECKLACE, AZUNI.CO.UK

THE THINGS I LOVE...

MY MUSIC LOVES

I love Adele, that's an obvious one. At the moment I'm listening to Jessie Ware's album and really enjoying it. And I really like The Civil Wars. My passion is to listen to classical music but when I'm running it'll be David Guetta, Justin Timberlake, Beyoncé and Rihanna.

MY GUILTY PLEASURE

Watching reality TV shows where people compete to see who has the best wedding.

MY MENTOR

My singing teacher, Beatrice Unsworth, was an amazing

mentor to me when I first came to London – she's a bit like a second mum. Moving to London from Wales was a massive step but she really kept an eye on me.

MY SIGNATURE DISH

I do a really good roast.

MY LUXURY INDULGENCE

I have got a thing for high quality bed linen with a very high thread count. I have Egyptian cotton sheets and a cashmere throw, and they're amazing. That's money well spent when you know you're going to have a good night's sleep.