

can you DO IT ALL?

Women who are singers, teachers, authors, administrators, wives, mothers and more weigh in on this age-old question.

BY MICHELLE LATOUR

“**S**ociologists say that women inhabit more roles these days than ever. This multiplicity of hats can translate into nonstop competing goals” (Rachael Combe, *Elle*, Dec. 2011). And those goals can be even more daunting if your job is as a singer. How do you juggle international career and motherhood? Or how about tenure-seeking artist-teacher while taking care of ailing parents? Or how about as singer, teacher, mom, and spouse? Or even aspiring singer with a 9-to-5 job? How do you do it all without losing yourself? Or do you even attempt to do it all?

Having it all and doing it all can be exhausting. According to the latest science on willpower, the best thing you can do for your productivity and equanimity is to give yourself a break (ibid.). I constantly struggle with this dilemma. As a singer, university professor, and writer in my 40s, I had recently re-evaluated my career path because honestly, I had chosen my career over everything else, including ruining a 12-year relationship that I ran into the ground. Although nearly six of those 12 years had been long distance, I had grown accustomed to work, work, work during our absences. Unfortunately, I was not able to shut that off when I did see my significant other.

After some hardcore soul searching, I determined not to make the same mistake twice. Easier said than done. Being an overachieving, type-A personality proves challenging no matter how much yoga I do, and I have found that balancing work and personal life can be exceedingly stressful. I asked women I admired—voice teachers with whom I have studied, singer friends who have fantastic careers, admirable colleagues, and current and former students who are figuring things out: “Is it possible to do it all?”

The Price of Having It All

“Women of our era have to do a lot of soul searching when it comes to family and career,” says soprano Zipporah Peddle, who sings in Cirque du Soleil’s *O*; recently formed the four-voice virtuoso ensemble, Vox Indigo; holds a master’s in voice performance from UNLV; and is engaged. “Can I really maintain my career goals and still be a loving and present

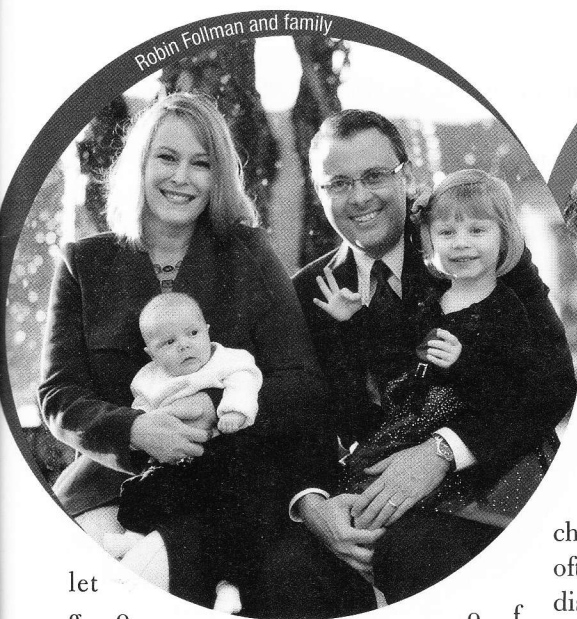
mother and partner? If I take some time off, how likely is it that I will be able to bounce back into a performance career? Will a potential gig cause problems in my personal life—and is it worth that risk? For me, having a successful and happy personal life has definitely moved into the number one spot in terms of priority.”

And since becoming the lead vocalist in *O* in 2007, Peddle feels her career move was life changing. “I spent my 20s jumping from show to show. At the time, it didn’t bother me since I wasn’t ready to settle down. My career was absolutely my number one priority. But as I got older, I started to wonder how exactly I was going to have a home and family without abandoning my ambitions, which is a common concern for performers. Ultimately, many of us choose to leave the business in order to get our personal lives on track. I am lucky in that I haven’t had to make that choice.”

“Remember when your parents told you that you could do it all? I took that to heart!” says Melinda Becker, mezzo-soprano and singer for Duo Fado, a voice-and-guitar collaboration, and adjunct professor of music and choral ensemble director at Marymount College. But not everyone agrees. Los Angeles-based keyboard collaborative artist Linda Zoolalian—who is music director, coach, and pianist for Opera Festival di Roma; pianist for Los Angeles Opera; and part of the adjunct faculties at Pomona College and Pasadena City College—says, “You can’t have it all unless you want to drive yourself crazy trying.”

Jeanie LoVetri, New York-based teacher and creator of the Somatic Voicework method, concurs. “I do think that trying to have it all is foolish. I don’t think it’s good to try to be a successful career woman, a great mother, a fabulous wife, as well as a wonderful daughter, sister, friend, and member of society while also trying to take care of your own needs, only to end up being exhausted and overextended. Women are still up against a lot of difficult social messages that cause inner conflict, and many of us continue to be strongly conditioned to be caretakers, helping others before we help ourselves. Present generations can still be pressured to be successful in careers but also to be in a relationship or to become mothers. It’s better to





let go of trying to have every possible experience and focus on doing a few things well."

Courtney Crouse, soprano and assistant professor of voice and opera director at the Wanda L. Bass School of Music at Oklahoma City University describes her balance: "Women are often givers and, if we aren't careful, there is nothing left for us. I become an unhappy person and lose the sense of my calling to be a teacher if I am trying to be too much to too many people, so I have learned to set aside clear boundaries of time."

What advice did other singers have? I followed up with the question "Do you have any advice for young female singers who are struggling with this dilemma?"

Sage Advice

Jenny Millsap, New York-based soprano and mother of two young boys, declares, "There is no right answer, it's just what you want and don't want. And if you want to have kids, then just have them. Don't wait for the perfect time or the perfect amount of money or the perfect point in your career. The perfect conditions hardly ever exist. Your life is very malleable. If you allow yourself to be flexible, you will find that your life changes shape to fit your children."

Singer, teacher, and mother of two, Rebecca Brandt Hample, agrees. "No matter where you are in life—with or without a family, career, children—you

changes. I have often thought I would be doing a disservice to all the time and money I spent, and all the love and guidance my teachers have given, if I decided to stop singing. Like it would be failing in some way. Then I see my children dancing and singing and realize all of my training is being put to the best use ever, to pass music on to the next generation. I got into singing to share music with others, and that's what I get to do every day."

Barbara DeMaio Caprilli, artistic director of American Singers' Opera Project and University of Central Oklahoma instructor of voice, reflects on her career change. "Decide what is important to you and design a career around that. I left full-time singing in my 50s, rather than going on into my 60s as I had originally planned, because I missed being with my husband and I discovered that I loved teaching. It's a lonely life on the road, and I decided that it was worth the cut in pay to have a teaching job, a home, and a husband to come home to every night. If you want an international career, you must choose your life partner wisely—a coach, pianist, conductor, or agent will be understanding of your travel and commitments [but] a plumber or policeman, probably not."

Lauren McKay, soprano and teacher, knew early on that she wanted a family above all else. However, since her husband is in the military, that has presented some additional challenges. "I decided that having a husband and

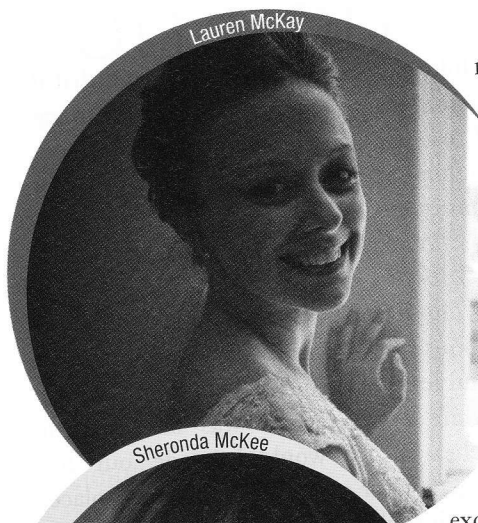
children were what I wanted, and that if a performance career was available to me I would pursue it, keeping traveling to a minimum and time with my family at a maximum.

"When I got married," she continues, "I had to really buckle down and stick to my decision. I couldn't be a military spouse and have a deployed husband and leave any potential children at home while I traveled or was in late-night rehearsals. I wouldn't trade our life together for anything. I chose my place, and it's wherever he is or waiting for him to return from wherever he is. I knew when I was little I wanted to sing, but I also knew that having a family would be a higher priority. If the most important thing to you is your career, you're doing the same thing as I am—you're just doing it in a different way."

Lisa Maresch—Los Angeles-based pianist and teacher; founder of the Scholarship Student Showcase for the Warne Foundation in Orange County, Calif.; director of a piano festival in American Samoa; and newly appointed to the board of directors for Arquetopia in Mexico, a nonprofit foundation for music and arts—suggests that "No matter which path you take, something has to give somewhere, so you have to decide what is most important for you. Whether you chose to become a performing musician or a mother, both professions are very noble and respectful. You should go into either career with great pride."

Many women stressed the need for some down time amid hectic schedules.

"There are times in the semester that are so busy and scheduled that my life is definitely not in balance," says soprano Linda Lister, assistant professor of voice and director of opera theater at UNLV and author of *Yoga for Singers*. "But I do try to make time for regular yoga and meditation practice. That restorative time keeps me more grounded and positive, which makes me a better teacher and colleague. Sometimes I go for a hike or a bike



Lauren McKay

ride and lose myself in nature to reconnect with myself. Riding my bike makes me feel like a kid again because it reminds me of my first taste of freedom and adventure."



Sheronda McKee

"I need to take breaks for my sanity!" exclaims Melissa Sugarman, soprano and graduate student at the University of Washington. "I give myself a few hours every week that are free from responsibility. It all lies in knowing your priorities and knowing the domino effect of your decisions. I used to sacrifice sleep to fit everything into

my life, and that only works for so long. Sleep is really, really important."

Several singers recommended envisioning how you would like your career to evolve in the long term. "Think ahead to yourself at 70," Millsap suggests. "Imagine in great detail what it would be like to have stopped your career where it is but to be in the loving embrace of your spouse with your kids and grandkids around you. Then imagine yourself wildly successful as a singer but alone. Decide which is more important to you and then do that."

Internationally acclaimed soprano, Robin Follman, who is also mother to two young children and CEO of the Follman-Young Foundation for the Arts, wholeheartedly concurs, "I would absolutely choose to have a family many times over. One day your singing career will be over, and you will have to live with the choices you make at the beginning of your career for the rest of your life. I always knew that singing and performing was not enough for me. It took singing with a friend of mine, Sari Gruber, to give me the courage to make the decision to start a family with medical assistance."

Fortunately, Follman's body responded to treatments, and she was able to have a family. And her singing career? "Even though I continued to perform, I kept it on a limited basis. Only now am I starting to plan out my singing future again."

BINGHAMTON
UNIVERSITY
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

We'll put you on stage!

TRI-CITIES
OPERA
Co-Founders Carmen Savoca & Peyton Hibbit

Master of Music: Opera
in conjunction with Tri-Cities Opera

Master of Music: Voice
Bachelor of Music

Voice Faculty Includes:

Mary Burgess, *soprano*
John Mario Di Costanzo,
conductor
Thomas Goodheart, *baritone*
Diane Richardson, *vocal coach*

Graduate
Assistantships &
Undergraduate
Scholarships

Audition Information:

bborton@binghamton.edu
burgess@binghamton.edu
music.binghamton.edu
(607) 777-2589



Robert Heepyoung Oh, MM in Opera (2013), Victoria Cannizzo, MM in Opera (2011) and Kirk Dougherty, RATP (2009-2011) star in *Il Trovatore*

Audition Dates
(Resident Artist Training Program):
November 22 & 23, 2013
in New York City

Audition Date
(MM Opera/Voice, Bachelor of Music):
February 8, 2014

Resident Artist
Training Program
John Mario Di Costanzo,
Associate Artistic Director

Professional Leading
Role Opportunities

Touring Education
Program

Weekly Workshops
& Coaching

Compensated
Positions
for Resident Artists

Audition Information:
info@tricitieopera.com
www.tricitieopera.com
(607) 729-3444

Courtney Crouse



Sarah Diller



"Make sure you are communicating with your management about your health and recovery once you have kids," Follman continues. "Your agent is working hard for you in a difficult

economy and deserves to know when you are truly ready for singing professionally again."

The bottom line? You have to decide for yourself how to balance career, family, and personal time. "Do not let any of the stress and hype about the

order in which things have to be done, or are perceived as having to be done, affect your own path," says Sheronda McKee, soprano and doctoral student at UNLV. Soprano Sarah Diller, graduate student of opera performance at Wichita State University adds, "Make the choices that you think will make you the happiest. You live with the choices you make, so don't let other people choose them for you."

Soprano Michelle Latour is part of the full-time voice faculty at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas and is the NATS Nevada State Governor. She is active as a singer, teacher, writer, adjudicator, and workshop presenter throughout California, Nevada, and the Midwest. Visit her online at www.michellelatour.com. CS

NYOS OPERA ADVANTAGE

July 7 through 22, 2013

**AT SUNY SULLIVAN,
LOCH SHELDRAKE, NY**

Join the esteemed professional faculty of the NYOS at SUNY Sullivan this summer for an intensive two-week program designed to guide singers through the process of integrating musical ideas, language skills, body language and acting craft in a highly creative and personally artistic way. This inspiring and creative program will change the way you approach your singing and performing forever.

Singers will prepare and perform parts of *The Marriage of Figaro*, culminating in two public performances.

Applications now being accepted. To apply or for more information, visit www.newyorkoperastudio.org

NEW YORK **OPERA**
STUDIO

CELEBRATING
11
YEARS



Jeannette LoVetri

"...[I] attribute my growth as an artist to her solid and clear teaching of technique."

– Luciana Souza,
2008 Grammy Award Winner

CONTEMPORARY COMMERCIAL MUSIC

**2013 Vocal Pedagogy Institute
July 13–22**

Somatic Voicework™ – The LoVetri Method

Level I, II, III

Post Certification courses offered:

- Studio Technology with Matt Edwards
- Barbershop Quartet Styles
- Theo Bleckmann: Avant-garde Styles

All courses earn one graduate credit.



SHENANDOAH™
UNIVERSITY
Shenandoah Conservatory

CONTACT US TO SIGN UP:

540-665-4556

ccminstitute@su.edu

www.ccminstitute.com