



My children are the best melody

Katherine Jenkins returns to the Ipswich stage after four years, during which she's become a wife and mother. And life couldn't be better, she says

WORDS: Mike Trippitt ♦ PHOTOS: David Venni

“I try to juggle the balls, keep the plates spinning,” says Katherine Jenkins, with a smile. For the Welsh mezzo-soprano, balancing the demands that come with international stardom, home life, motherhood and being Auntie Kath, is not always easy. But she says, she is like all working mums.

“I don't know how you do it, but yes, it's a juggle. It's testing quite often, but it's also brilliant, and

I probably wouldn't have it any other way. It's just a really lovely time of life.”

The singer embarks on a UK and Ireland tour on April 26, returning to The Regent Theatre, Ipswich on May 23. The 22 concerts coincide with the release of her first album for four years, a time in which much has changed.

“I got married and I have two children. I feel very much in a place of just feeling very settled,

and happy, and thankful. I thought that was a really nice sentiment to take into the studio. It's a really, very emotional and intimate, personal album.”

Called *Guiding Light*, for Katherine, the 15-song collection is the culmination of a deeply emotional journey. “I've always felt there was something leading me on a path, whether that be my father, who passed [away] when I was 15, or my faith, or now my children.

“They're all songs that are actually linked – quite inspirational, quite spiritual, some that touched me in the heart. I hope that because they had such an emotional effect on me, they will affect the listener when they listen to the album.” *Guiding Light* combines religious favourites *Eternal Father Strong to Save* and *Morning has Broken* – a duet with Sir Bryn Terfeld – with choral piece *A Gaelic Blessing*, and the stand-out *Never Enough* from *The Greatest Showman*. But, she says, she is not trying to show how many notes she can hit.

“It didn't need to be showy. I felt I wanted to make something that was really heartfelt, and be really open and honest, and just sing from the heart. That's what the album is – it is songs that really mean something, or moved me to tears when I first heard them.”

Katherine Jenkins' fans will be treated not only to her new songs at The Regent, but will also hear favourites from her

Katherine's feeling settled, happy and thankful



last 13 albums. Although, she says, the concert will be personal and intimate like her album, she has a strongly held belief that concert goers should experience the best of live music. She will be accompanied in Ipswich by The London Concert Orchestra. Katherine also believes that everyone should have a good time at her concerts.

"Sometimes people think they are coming to a classical concert, and that it is very formal. I really like mine to be very relaxed, informal and fun. Hopefully, we can move people with the music, but in between the songs we can have a laugh, and I can share anecdotes of why I chose certain songs. So it's really about enjoying the night, and making memories."

One song that Katherine will sing is *Jealous of the Angels* the first single to be released from the latest album. Jenn Bostic's song has become an anthem for the bereaved. The American country singer wrote it about her own father's death when she was 16 and the parallels to Katherine Jenkins' experience are obvious, since she was just 15 when she lost her father.

"When I first heard it, it literally made me ball my eyes out. It was because the words are so emotional and so relevant to what happened to my dad. My dad passed very, very quickly. He had cancer and was given six months to live, but he went in under two. Because of that, I didn't get to say goodbye to him.

"The opening lines are, 'I didn't know today would be our last'. I think when you have gone through something like this,

A song for Xander

Katherine wrote one track on *Guiding Light* especially for her son. "I didn't set out with the intention of writing a song about him. We'd nearly finished the album, but he'd fallen asleep in my arms, because he was really little when I was recording. I just find that I pray for these children all the time. I think as a mum you want only the best for them, and so I sat there and wrote this lullaby prayer for his life.

"When I played it to my producer, he said we have to include this on the album, we have to fit it in somehow." While Katherine is pleased that Xander's Song is included, she says, with a smile: "He's probably going to be mortified with me and hate me for it."



ABOVE: Katherine has written a song on her new album for her son, Xander

and you just don't understand why that person may have been taken away, it's hopeful to think that God took them, because God needed another angel. To see them like that brought me comfort.

"My dad died more than 20 years ago but I hope that in singing this, and introducing it to my fans, it will bring comfort to some people who might just be going through that fresh grief."

Katherine was last at The Regent in March 2015. Since then she and husband Andrew Levitas have had two children, daughter Aaliyah, 3, and Xander, aged 12 months. She now has a life she says she never expected to have and, consequently, values it more.

"Hopefully that comes across in the music. I am in such a happy place, where I can just focus on the good stuff, and these children are such a gift, such a blessing in my life. I get emotional just

thinking about it. They are the best melody that I know."

Motherhood has brought practical adjustments to Katherine's professional life. "I don't do as much international touring now, because I just want to be at home with them while they are so little. I want to include them as much as possible, so they come with me to the shows that are near me, and they come on stage with the orchestra, and to rehearsals." There are other changes too, to how she sees life, her purpose and the future.

"I think it's really chilled me out, and it's made me a better version of myself. It's made me more patient, calmer, more understanding. It's so strange, you can be the tireddest you have ever felt, but you can also have the most energy that you've ever had, because you just do it for them. It's really been the best thing that's ever happened to me." ♦