

Q&A

Casey Donovan, singer, songwriter & actor, 33

Since winning *Australian Idol* at 16, you've done it all: albums, concerts, plays, opera, musical theatre, TV... is there a plan? The plan is to just give it a go. I think that's always kind of been my motto. I mean, I never thought I'd win *Australian Idol*. I auditioned for it after my stepdad said "you want to do music, we're gonna do something about it". And I think that's kind of how I've been brought up: "Yes, it's scary. But just give it a go and see." So I find myself doing all the things that scare me. The payoff is that I get to embrace those fears and kind of go, "aah, it's not that scary".

How daunting was the pivot to acting? I stumbled into musical theatre after my music career slowed down and my manager suggested auditioning for *The Sapphires* [2010]. I love playing a character, being a part of a team, being directed and just learning on the go. I get to work with people like Marina Prior and Caroline O'Connor and Eddie Perfect... they are my teachers, and I'm grateful to be able to sit and watch and learn.

The musical *9 to 5* is based on the 1980 film exploring sexism in the workplace. Did you have to dig deep to relate to your character, the repressed homemaker Judy? There is a lot we don't have in common. But surprisingly, I didn't have to dig too deep. She's had to go out there and fend for herself ... and she grows quite dramatically, unlike Jane Fonda in the movie. The musical theatre version is very much fleshed out, and Judy's is one of the biggest arcs; by the end she's grown this backbone and stepped into her worth. I've met so many strong women who've had to build themselves up like that. You go through life, you stumble and you get back up, and you find new things to motivate you.

Such as *I'm a Celebrity... Get me Out of Here!* in 2017? [laughs] At the time the tour of the musical *We Will Rock You* had ended, and I was driving an Uber and kind of going, what am I doing with my life? Eventually I kind of went, what's the worst that could happen? And then of course I realised a lot of things that were very bad happened in that TV show!

You were the ultimate winner, raising \$100,000 for the Starlight Children's Foundation. What else happened?



Most people had only seen me when I was a teenager, very shy, timid and placid. And now they saw a 28-year-old woman who'd had all this life experience, had downs and had ups... Australia kind of went, "Oh, wow, there she is". I was able to come out on top, embrace who I was and be unapologetically me. To have the Australian public go, "OK, you've got this. Just come on, start believing in yourself". It was a very beautiful thing.

One of your charitable roles is as an ambassador with RUOK. In a high-pressure industry, how do you look after your own head and heart? I put on music, I watch TV, I try to be as mindful as I can. Hosting episodes of a mindfulness podcast [*The Space*, Nova Entertainment] has helped a lot. I go for walks, I play with the cat, I get to hang out and talk to my beautiful partner Renee and yeah, just unwind.

You look absolutely radiant – and I don't just mean that gold dress. What's going on? It's been a long road, and I'm at a place now where I have literally "shed the shit". I've gotten rid of people from my life that were pulling me down and manipulating me; my tolerance for that has become very small. I feel like that's the empowering change in my life: going, "Nah, you know what? Nah, I'm done." [Laughs] "I'm done now."

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9 to 5 is at the
Capitol Theatre, Sydney
until April 17; Brisbane
from May 22 and
Melbourne from July 10.
9to5themusical.com.au