

breath of fresh air

Opera singers David Corcoran and Margaret Plummer fell in love with yoga instantly. *By Liz Graham*

David Corcoran has his local barber to thank for his love of yoga.

“A couple of years ago, I wasn’t happy with the gym I’d been going to, and so was telling my barber about it during a hair cut,” explains Corcoran, 30. “I said that I needed a new activity, and the barber, who is a blokey kind of guy, said that I should try yoga, and that it’s the hardest thing you can do.”

His curiosity spiked, Corcoran tried out the yoga class his barber had recommended, which was a blend of Ryoho yoga (a Japanese corrective style of yoga) and dynamic vinyasa taught at a studio a few streets away from his home in Manly. Instantly hooked, Corcoran began attending several classes a week, and encouraged his wife and fellow opera singer Margaret Plummer to join him.

“Neither of us was happy with the gym,” remembers Plummer, now 27. “Yoga, however, changed our body shapes, made us feel more grounded, and made more sense with our lifestyle.”

Having a shared passion outside of work was a big part of the appeal. “Because we’re in the same industry, we can feel like we only have that in common—a lot of what we talk about is opera. It was great to have this new shared thing that made us feel so good,” says Plummer, who is a full-time chorus member with Opera Australia and will perform in 12 productions this year. Corcoran, a tenor soloist with the company, was most recently seen in the role of David in the debut season of *Bliss*, and later in the year will star as the Duke in Verdi’s *Rigoletto*.

Despite their hectic travel schedule (which involves several six-week stints in Melbourne), Corcoran and Plummer continue to be taught by the same teacher who gave them their first class, Louisa Kolega. “We haven’t experimented with any other style, we get all that we need and want from [Louisa],” says Corcoran, who praises Louisa’s ability to tailor poses to their flexibility and strength, and for helping them to keep up their yoga while performing for long stints away. “We travel for up to six weeks at a time, and Louisa will create a separate yoga program for each of us, each time we go away, focusing on different areas,” says Corcoran. “Sometimes

I’ve got only 15 minutes a day, sometimes I’ve got an hour to practise, so she gives me a short version and a long version, too.”

Corcoran also found that their opera training actually helps them with their yoga. “With opera singing, the breathing you do is all about low, deep breathing, using the lower diaphragm,” he says. “The chest will move, but you don’t focus on lifting from there, so it’s very complementary to the breathing in yoga.” Likewise, concepts of body alignment are also very similar. “When I demonstrated the correct singing posture to Louisa, she said that’s almost the perfect yoga alignment. If I ever get into trouble with a pose, I just think about how I would align my body for singing, and that will keep me in the right place.”

The arrival of their son, Edwin, about a year ago, has understandably brought sweeping changes to all areas of their life, including their yoga practice.

“Well, it’s impossible now to go to yoga class together, so we have to divide it up, you go one time, I’ll mind our son, then the other way round,” says Corcoran, who adds that his asana practice has decreased to around twice a week. Plummer describes hers as more “sporadic”, wistfully explaining that with full-time singing, and Edwin now being mobile, there’s not much time for her personal practice. “The minute I do it, I feel better, I just have to remind myself of that,” she laughs.

Both her and Corcoran have gravitated towards meditation during this time. “It’s much easier to do when you get home from a show,” Plummer says. “It can be hard to wind down, so a meditation helps to pull myself together.” Adds Corcoran, “We’ve bought some meditation chairs and gotten some spoken meditations for our iPods.” He also creates playlists of classical music to help him meditate. “As singers, we have so much music in our head, and it’s sometimes just four bars on repeat,” says Corcoran. “You end up going a little bit spare, so you need [different music] to divert your attention.”

Their joint interest in meditation has blossomed so much that it’s a major goal of both of theirs to attend a vipassana silent-meditation retreat, albeit separately, due to the rules about gender segregation.

“Our industry is all about our voices and communicating, so it would be such a big challenge,” Plummer says. “I think the monkeys in my mind would go nuts!” ❀

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Top: David Corcoran as Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly*. Left: Margaret Plummer at an Opera On The Big Screen event in Sydney.

David Corcoran and Margaret Plummer (with their one-year-old son Edwin) in their local suburb of Manly. Both maintain a yoga and meditation practice despite a hectic travel schedule and growing family.