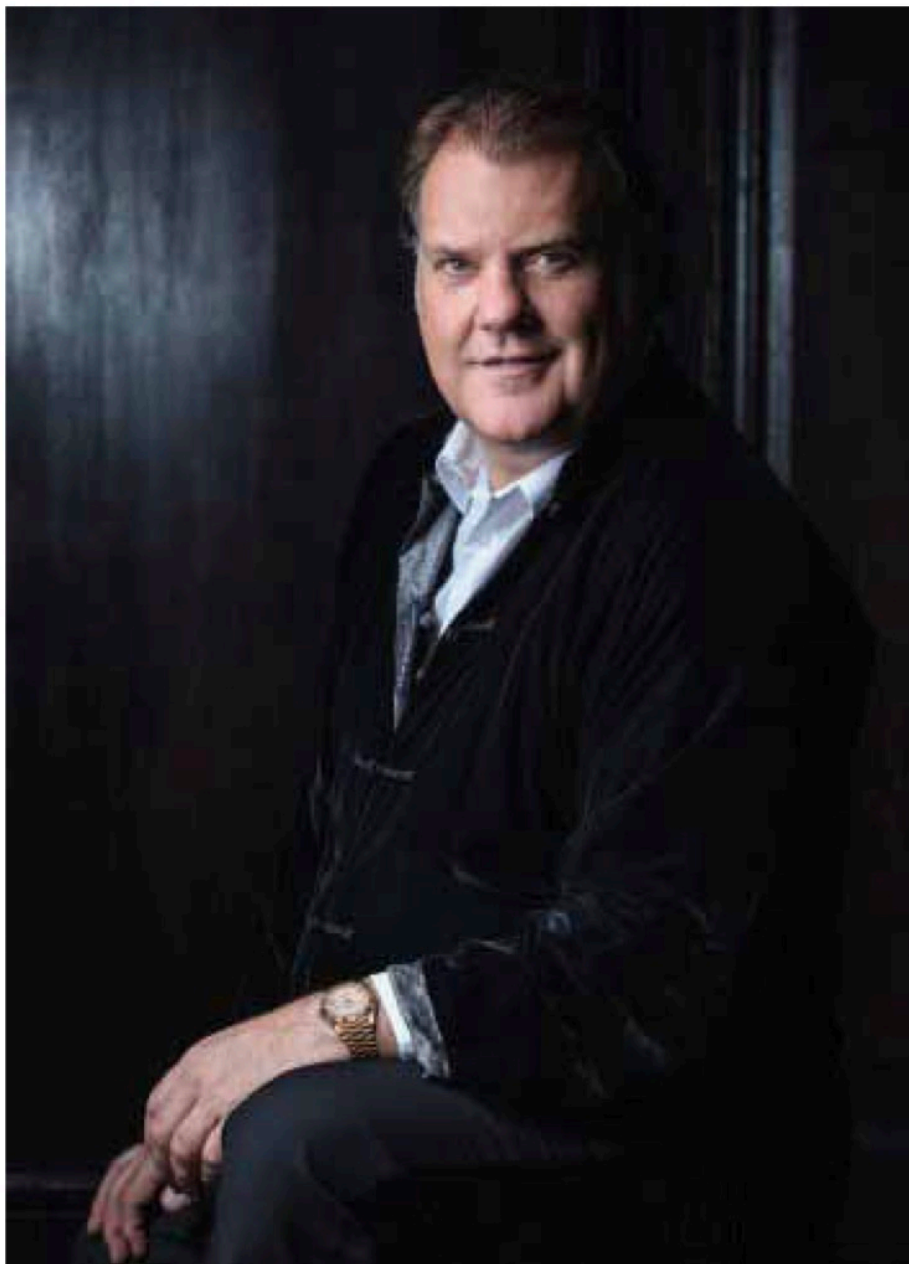




“

This is what you are born to do. Sing it and enjoy it

– Bryn Terfel

Opposite from left: Bryn Terfel as Sir John Falstaff; as The Dutchman; and in concert.

observe local village characters such as Uncle Will, a fisherman and churchgoer with a striking tenor voice.

“The chapel would bring the farming community together on a Sunday morning,” he says. “Uncle Will knew all the hymns. He’d always sing louder than anybody else. You giggle at first but then you take it seriously. We all loved singing. At school, I counterbalanced this with being a good sportsman.”

Terfel is 193cm, with a broad-shouldered silhouette as suited to rugby or basketball as to Wotan, Figaro or opera bad boys Sweeney Todd and Baron Scarpia (“I have to be careful with the malcontents, as you tend to jump in and overdo it”). He might have pursued a rugby career were it not for breaking his nose seven times on the field, then turning his rugged features, complete with a childhood dog bite scar, to full charismatic use onstage. His audition for the Guildhall of Music in London (he won a scholarship) was the first time he and his parents had crossed the Welsh border.

“Being Welsh is everything for me. The mountains, lakes, castles and coastline,” says Terfel, who lives in the seaside town of Penarth outside Cardiff, and speaks Welsh with his wife and kids at home. He supports the next generation of performers through the Cronfa Syr Bryn Terfel, a permanent foundation at the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama for emerging performing artists, and is also a coach on S4C’s *Y Llais*, the Welsh version of *The Voice*, where he worked with Carrie Sauce, a Welsh drag performer who went on to win.

He has a holiday place, too, on Spain’s Costa del Sol, where he spent the northern summer holidays, swimming, drinking fine wine, playing a bit of golf (he has a respectable 12 handicap) and reading Simon Callow’s biography of Richard Wagner. He tells me he doesn’t perform Wagner much these days – no wonder, given the demands the composer placed on bass-baritones.

“But I’ll always remember singing Hans Sachs in *Die Meistersinger* for the BBC Proms in 2010 with my dear Welsh

National Opera,” he says, reflecting on his longstanding relationship with the company, and a role that stretched for roughly half of the epic comedy’s six-hour running time. “I got tired just before the denouement, but I reached the end. I still give myself a pat on the back for that.”

Terfel’s self-belief, you feel, has been key to his success. That, and his “bucketful of talent”, his charisma, and his drive to never let his colleagues – or his audience – down.

“When your moment comes to sing, you know the soprano to your left is listening. The orchestra is listening. And if you’re not reaching their dizzy heights of quality ...” He pauses. “Early on I said to myself, ‘You can do it. This is what you are born to do. Sing it and enjoy it.’”

Another smile. “It’s been a magnificent journey.” 🍷

Bryn Terfel will perform in Sydney on October 26, 30 and 31; Adelaide on November 11 and 13; and Melbourne on November 19 and 21.