Barbara's a classical singer and a classical mother

HONG KONG HOMES

HOUSEWIFE

BARBARA Fei is a well-known name among music circles in Hongkong.

Her talent as a classical singer needs little introduction even to those who have attended but one of her many successful concerts during the past 10 years.

But what is Barbara like as a housewife and mother?

"Just like any other housewife and mother," says Barbara.

Husband

Her husband is James Coe, a Swatow jewellery dealer she married 18 years ago in Hongkong. They have two sons – Jimmy Junior (9) and Harvey (7).

"Many people have the impression that if a woman is successful in an artistic field, her life must be very colourful and dramatic and totally different from the lives of ordinary beings," says Barbara.

"It just isn't true."

She describes her personal life as "commonplace" and "mundane."

Barbara's time is spent between looking after her two children, giving singing lessons to pupils in the morning, practising singing herself and wondering how to deal with the latest amah problem.

True enough – even classical singers have amah problems.

Says Barbara: "My amah problem is twofold – first, I have trouble getting them to stay on for any considerable period of time.

Swatow

"Second, the one that does stay on and has been with the family for a number of years speaks nothing but Swatow. And my children and friends have trouble getting themselves understood."

Barbara herself has no language problems.

Born in Soochow and brought up in Peking, she speaks seven dialects (Mandarin, Cantonese, Shanghainese, Szechuanese, Ning-por, Soochow and Swatow dialects) and three foreign languages (English, French and German).

"My training as a singer helped me in learning languages quickly," says Barbara.

This training has also taken her to Europe, the United States, Taiwan and Singapore.

She was the first Chinese singer to give a recital at the Auckland International Music Festival in 1968.

When her children were born, she had less time for travelling and concerts.

"Sometimes I don't get to practise my new songs till midnight when the children are all in bed," says Barbara.

But for all her insistence on describing herself as the "ordinary" housewife and mother, Barbara shows herself to be very much out of the ordinary in her emphasis on all-round musical education for her children.

"I want my children to grow up with a sound appreciation of good music," says Barbara.

Concerts

Both Jimmy and Harvey, young as they are, have already attended more concerts than they can keep track of.

And their mother hopes for both to take to a musical instrument when they grow up.

At present, Barbara is rehearsing for a joint recital Yuen Yan-kwong at the City Hall on May 16.

How does she find time?

"It's just a matter of compromise," says Barbara. "Husband, children and art – they are all a very important part of my life.

"And when things are important enough to you, you just find time for it."

● BARBARA Fei, the classical singer.

● BARBARA practising the piano at home.

● BARBARA with her husband James and their children, Harvey and Jimmy.