

Helen Reddy

Australian Singer

Died 2020, aged 78 years

Right song in the right place at the right time.

In 1966, Melbourne-born Helen Reddy, aged 25 years, won a talent contest on the television program *Bandstand*. The prize was a trip to the US. She built a singing career there and eventually was looking for a song that reflected her positive self-image. She had to write it herself—'I am Woman'. Then she could not get it played on any of the radio stations. One record executive asked her husband "Why are you letting your wife do this stuff?" He was her greatest supporter and eventually managed to get a small radio station on the outskirts of Washington DC to play it. They were inundated with requests to play it again.

It became a smash hit in the same year that the *Equal Rights Amendment* passed the Senate and when Shirley Chisholm, a black American, ran for the Democratic nomination

for the presidency. 'I am Woman' became the defining song of the second feminist movement in the Seventies. Just a month after it reached number one on the Billboard charts, the US Supreme Court decided *Roe v. Wade*, agreeing that a 'right to privacy' in the Constitution protected a pregnant woman's right to choose whether or not to have an abortion, although not absolutely.

Reddy won a Grammy in 1972, making headlines again by thanking God "Because She makes everything possible". Although she had global hits with 'Delta Dawn', 'I don't know how to love him', and 'You and me against the world', it is 'I am Woman' that echoes in the mind when we think of Australian singer, Helen Reddy.