

THE MELBA

MAGAZINE OF MELBA OPERA TRUST

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LEARNING FROM THE BEST – NICOLE CAR & ÉTIENNE DUPUIS
MELBA ARTISTS – LOOKING AHEAD TO A BRIGHT FUTURE
ALUMNI UPDATES

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About Melba Opera Trust

Melba Opera Trust delivers Australia’s premier opera development program, built on Dame Nellie Melba’s philosophy that ‘a beautiful voice is not enough’. Launched by a bequest in Melba’s will and continued today by a community of dedicated donors, the Melba Program prepares a new generation of exceptional Australian artists for opera’s world stage.

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Natalie Grimmett and Nicole Car

Image: Anna Kučera

Melba Opera Trust acknowledges the traditional owners of the land on which we work and we pay our respect to elders past, present and emerging.

Note from the Chief Executive Officer

It has been a joy to deliver our complete program this year: back in the rehearsal room and entertaining audiences at a vast array of performances.

The growth in each of our artists has been remarkable. We see it in the increased understanding of self and the industry, the empowerment that comes from realising what they can achieve with commitment and guidance, learning to ask the right questions and to process feedback (good and bad) and taking responsibility for their own time, preparation and performance. Our ‘more than a voice’ mantra seeded a confidence that shone through both on and off the stage.

Then there’s the artistic journey. This year’s team of mentors has nurtured an appreciation of language and its role in storytelling. They’ve carefully guided the development of repertoire and beautiful singing, encouraged thorough character development, and helped these talented artists to grow into young professionals supported by meaningful industry contacts.

Earlier this year during her masterclass, Nicole Car made an observation along the lines of: ‘You sing it beautifully now – we want you to be able to sing it just as effortlessly in 10 years’ time.’

That, in a nutshell, is what we are trying to impart through the Melba Program: practical tools, guided by individual needs, and focused on developing healthy habits for a long and sustainable career.

Mentors are quick to remind the artists that ‘the learning never stops’ – there’s always something to strive for. And this year certainly provided our current artists with a phenomenal foundation. I’m extremely proud of their dedication and hard work, and I am especially grateful to the mentors and donors who’ve made this life-changing learning possible.

Meanwhile, 57 Melba alumni are now gracing the stages of opera houses around the world. When we launched Melba Opera Trust in 2008, we couldn’t have imagined that we’d have alumni performing around Australia, in London, Scotland, Paris, Spain, San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, Finland, Munich, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Dresden, Hong Kong, Japan and Russia – and that’s only in the past six months! But the learning never stops, and I’m delighted to be continuing to support the artistic development of our alumni through the next round of alumni grants in November.



Amy Black, Chief Executive Officer

It’s particularly rewarding to hear our talented Melba alumni on home soil and that is increasingly possible thanks to the programming of the state opera companies and symphony orchestras, Opera Australia, Pinchgut Opera and Sydney Chamber Opera. You may have spotted several ‘Melbas’ in the recent season announcements.

Finally, on behalf of all our artists, I would like to thank you for the role you play in supporting this world-class development program. Raising an opera singer takes a village and we are extremely grateful for ours.

Welcoming new board member Liz Gaynor

Recently appointed to the Melba Opera Trust board, Liz Gaynor is a judge of the County Court and an experienced criminal defence barrister.

Outside of her professional career, Liz has a passion for helping and mentoring young people and a strong connection to the music world. In her spare time, she plays piano regularly, and her mother taught the instrument for many years. Her son is also a music producer and two of her nieces play in their own band.

Apart from her passion for music, it was the values of Melba Opera Trust that resonated most strongly with her when she was approached to join the board.

‘I love opera, and I just loved the sound of this program. The philosophy of the Melba Opera Trust aligns strongly with what drives me personally. Helping young artists is such a valuable goal, because being an opera singer or a repetiteur is so time-consuming. There is so much training involved. It’s also a very expensive pursuit, and many

artists are unable to generate income for sustained periods of time, due to the sheer costs involved in pursuing a career in opera.’

Liz believes the support that Melba Opera Trust, and organisations like it, provides to young people is invaluable. Her own background and interest in mentoring young barristers mirrors the nurturing approach of Melba Opera Trust, and as a board member she is motivated by a strong desire to continue supporting young people to succeed.

‘It’s so important to me to try and give something back to the next generation,’ she says. ‘There are significant financial burdens on this generation and organisations like Melba Opera Trust are providing a career pathway for young people that they might not otherwise have. We are in a privileged position in this organisation to be able to help some immensely talented people to make the most of the wonderful gifts they have been given. I’m absolutely delighted to be part of that.’



The philosophy of Melba Opera Trust aligns strongly with what drives me personally



Artist in focus

Su Choung

Collaborative pianist Su Choung has been involved with the Melba Program since 2020. This year she is the repetiteur for Victorian Opera's productions of *The Butterfly Lovers* and *A Christmas Carol*.

'I'm currently reflecting a lot as I'm heading towards what feels like a graduation of sorts, after three years with Melba Opera Trust. My first contract with Victorian Opera starts the day after I finish my last module. So, no time to think!'

Su says she feels 'very fortunate' for the skills Melba Opera Trust has given her.

'There are so many people with talent – and talent has a lot to do with success – but this program has shown me that it takes much more than that: all the regular things people talk about like preparation, learning the notes and putting in the hard work. Very quickly after starting this program, I realised I could bring other aspects of my personality into the job. A repetiteur needs – and I've seen this in my mentors – a certain sixth sense for reading the room and adapting to suit the needs of the singers we support. That's a huge part of what I've learnt at Melba. Getting this opportunity at Victorian Opera was, I think, partly down to the fact that I learnt how to develop that sixth sense.'

Artistic Manager and Artist Advisor Sharolyn Kimmorley, who has worked with Su throughout her program of study, says Su's contracts with Victorian Opera will be an opportunity to continue her artistic development:

One of the biggest challenges for a solo pianist as they dive into the world of opera is the transition that needs to be made in thinking and playing like an orchestra. Su and I have worked a lot on this but it is only the practical experience in an opera company that will complete this cycle of learning. I am delighted that Victorian Opera has given Su two wonderful opportunities to put so much of what she has worked on over the past three years into practice.

Su herself says that she 'wouldn't be ready' for this opportunity without the support she has had from the Melba Opera Trust:

I couldn't have dreamed of throwing myself into this situation without the training I've had and the pressure I've been put under to deliver. One thing that's been fantastic about the



scholarship is noting how much work goes into cultivating an environment where artists feel safe and pushed – there is so much work happening beneath the surface, and it all contributes. I think I have a slightly different perspective as a repetiteur because I am the support in the room. That means I'm perhaps more keenly aware of the amount of support around me.

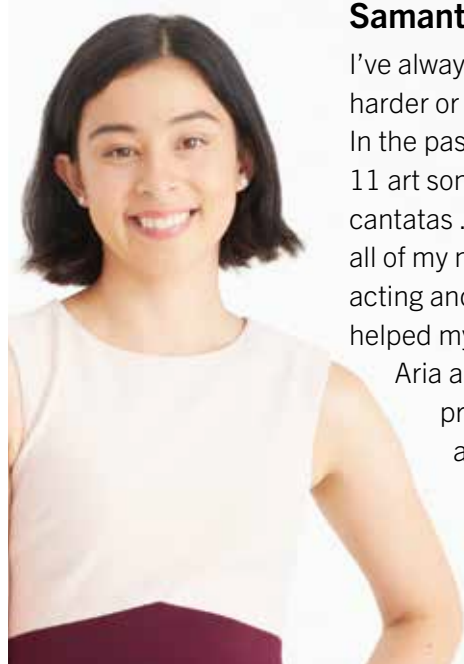
Su is the recipient of the Margaret Schofield Opera Scholarship and the Mel & Nina Waters Award.

There are so many people with talent – and talent has a lot to do with success – but this program has shown me that it takes much more than that

Looking ahead to a bright future

Reflections and postcards from the 2022 Melba Artists

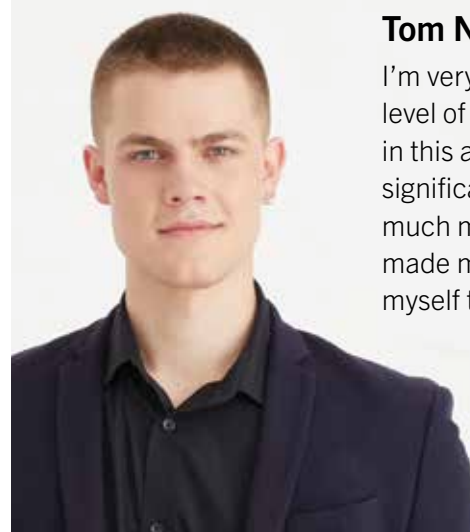
After more than 80 workshops, dozens of performances and countless hours spent refining their craft, Melba Artists tell us what the journey has meant for them, and what comes next.



Samantha Hargreaves – soprano

I've always been a hard worker but I have never worked harder or felt more fulfilled than with Melba Opera Trust. In the past nine months, I have learnt and performed 11 art songs, 5 arias, 14 ensembles, 4 masses and 3 cantatas ... and I don't plan on stopping! I've approached all of my new repertoire with a greater specificity in my acting and attention to detail in the languages. It certainly helped my preparation for the finals of the Herald Sun Aria and Acclaim awards, and I was thrilled to receive prizes in both. I am currently in the process of applying for international music schools in the hope of obtaining a scholarship in 2023.

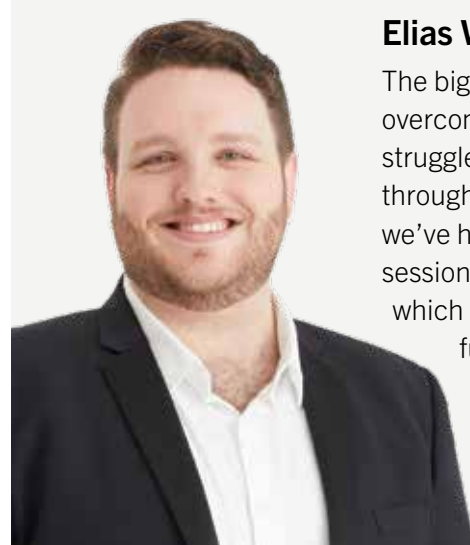
*Dame Nellie Melba Scholarship
Patrick & Vivian Gordon Award
Eleanor Blakemore Opera Society Scholarship*



Tom Nicholson – baritone

I'm very proud of having learnt more about the level of artistry required to be truly excellent in this art form. I have applied what I've learnt significantly this year, but I also feel there's so much more to learn and perfect. This year has made me more excited than ever to really push myself to the highest level I can be.

Joseph Sambrook Opera Scholarship



Elias Wilson – tenor

The biggest thing Melba has helped me overcome this year is some of my internal struggles with confidence. This has been partly through the many performance opportunities we've had, but also through one-on-one sessions with a performance psychologist, which were enabled through my scholarship funding. These have been a total game changer for both my mental health and my relationship with performance as an art and as an industry.

Harold Blair Opera Scholarship



James Emerson – bass-baritone

This year I've grown as a professional performer, with preparation and discipline as key factors in my development. In November and December I'll be travelling to the UK for auditions for further study, which would begin in September 2023. Being a Melba Artist this year has been the best thing to have happened to me and I certainly look forward to the many exciting opportunities on the horizon.

*John & Elizabeth Wright-Smith Scholarship
Paulette Bisley Opera Scholarship*



Natalie Grimmett – soprano

This year I have really discovered the level of detail we, as artists, are required to know about the art of singing. The intricacies of language diction, how it feels to build a good and reliable foundational singing technique (not relying on talent alone!), the entire business side of things – I wasn't aware of just how much I didn't know until I became a Melba Artist.

Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship

Greetings from sunny San Francisco!

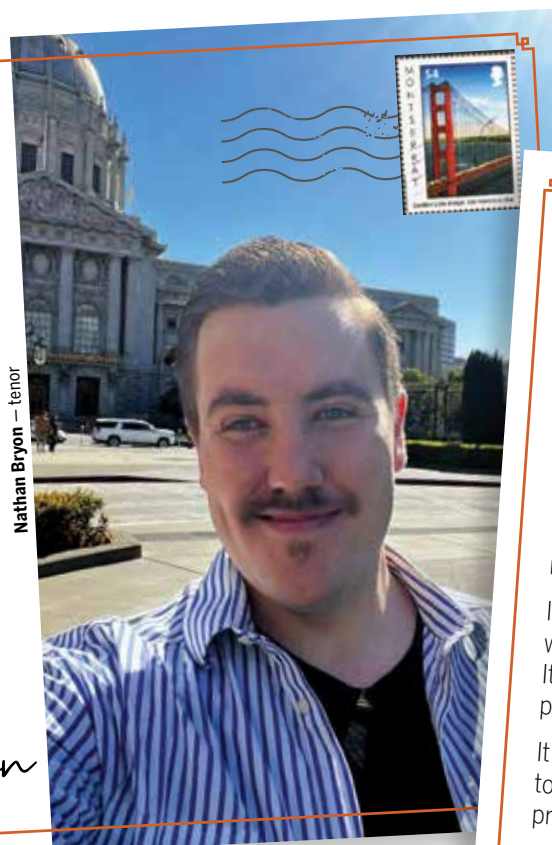
It has been a little over a month since I set off to undertake an Artist Diploma at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and I am pleased to announce that it is even more than I could have hoped for.

I spent a few days indulging in tourist activities before getting into my studies, which then kicked off with high intensity! We auditioned for the Fall Opera in the first week and I've been cast in the early Bizet opera *Le Docteur Miracle*, which promises to be great fun. I felt very equipped for the intensity of this course thanks to my time with Melba Opera Trust family, in fact it felt quite familiar!

I have also caught up with Melba alumna Morgan Balfour, who has been so kind in giving me the lay of the land! Morgan is doing great things and it was really wonderful to be able to connect with a fellow Aussie so soon after arriving.

Sending all best wishes,

Nathan Bryon



Nathan Breeze *Annie McFarling Opera Scholarship*
Max & Jill Schultz Opera Society Scholarship
Nathan Bryon *Ruskin Opera Scholarship*
Ryman Healthcare Opera Scholarship

Hello Melba community,

I've arrived in London to study for a master's degree in vocal performance at the Royal College of Music and just got through the induction week.

The facilities are incredible and auditions for the various operas in first semester are underway. Following my first audition, I am thrilled to be playing the character John Styx in Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld* at the Royal College of Music. I'm excited to begin singing lessons with my new teacher, Russell Smythe.

I'm staying at the beautiful Goodenough College, which was recommended by a Melba alumnus. It's a very friendly community and will be a great place to live.

It's a very significant and sombre day in the UK today as I head out this morning to see the funeral procession of Queen Elizabeth II.

Warmest wishes,

Nathan Breeze



Melba Artists year in review

From the rehearsal room to the stage



Artistic insights from the experts

Nicole Car & Étienne Dupuis in Masterclass

In July we proudly welcomed renowned Australian soprano Nicole Car and her husband, French-Canadian baritone Étienne Dupuis, as mentors in the Melba Program.

Nicole has established herself as one of the world's leading sopranos, performing at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Metropolitan Opera, Dallas Opera, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Opera Australia and Opéra de Paris. Étienne is in equally high demand as principal artist with companies such as San Francisco Opera, the Metropolitan Opera and Wiener Staatsoper.

Their time with the Melba Program began with an informal industry dinner with the artists, followed by two intensive masterclasses in Melbourne and Sydney. It was an invaluable opportunity for our artists to glean wisdom from some of the best in the business.

'It's not often you get to work with one great opera singer in a masterclass setting, let alone two! They were so generous with their time and astute in their feedback and suggestions. It was



one of the highlights of the year!' said current artist Nathan Bryon.

Nicole and Étienne approached their work with sensitivity and consideration.

Nathan Breeze's favourite reflection was hearing Étienne say: 'You'll get it one day, and then the next day it will be gone.'



'To hear an experienced singer reflect on his youth and his own personal struggles with technique was reassuring. It reminded me that it takes time, patience and persistence.'

Much of the repertoire selected for the masterclasses was from roles the dynamic duo had performed

themselves, and they were keenly aware of the opportunities and challenges each piece presented. They offered practical suggestions and character context that made an obvious impact on our artists.

By introducing our artists to mentors such as Nicole and Étienne, Melba helps them establish professional relationships in the industry – a very important part of a young artist's journey – and Étienne was quick to recognise this:

In the world of opera, networking is an incredibly useful tool. One that is not taught particularly well, unfortunately, especially in between singing lessons! Any young performer should value the exchanges and the relationships Melba Opera Trust facilitates by inviting seasoned professionals for masterclasses and discussions.

The artistic insights and world-class perspective they generously shared will have a lasting impact on our artists and we are grateful for the support of such esteemed industry colleagues.

The Masterclass Series

Preparing our artists for the pressure of performance

We are extremely grateful and proud to announce Dr Bruce Caldwell as the sponsor of our masterclass series for the next three years. Masterclasses underpin much of the work of Melba's Mentor Program and represent far more than the artistic exchange that takes place at the class itself.

Apart from the artistic insights and opportunities for development the masterclasses provide our artists, they have a deeper significance that aligns with the vision of the Melba Program as a whole.

The 'masters' bring their global experience and perspectives to the program, and these insights represent the international standard the program aspires to instil in our artists. After all, there is nothing that makes an artist feel more vulnerable than being constructively criticised by people you admire in front of a room full of strangers. Like auditions, it is confronting and can be uncomfortable, but it gets easier with experience. We regularly receive feedback from alumni that the masterclasses prepared them for the pressure of auditions.

The masterclasses help broaden our artists' perspective too – helping them to understand what is expected of them to perform competitively at an international standard.

It also gives them an opportunity to connect with the global industry that they might otherwise not have. There have been many instances of artists meeting leading figures through their masterclass work before going on to share the stage with them in their professional careers. Melba alumna Bronwyn Douglass, for example, will soon make her principal artist debut with Opera Australia as Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*. As it happens, this production will be conducted by Guillaume Tourniaire, with whom Bronwyn had worked in the Melba Program masterclass series.

Melba Opera Trust CEO Amy Black said: 'People often underestimate the role that masterclasses play in the Mentor Program. They really are a cornerstone for much of our work and we are so grateful to Bruce for his generous sponsorship of the series.'

Donor Bruce Caldwell said:

I was motivated to support the masterclass series because, simply put, it's a tangible way to help young people fulfil their dreams. Melba Opera Trust always seemed to me to be a really well-organised operation, and what I respect about the program is it's not just about singing. It's about learning to become a whole performer: how to get a contract, how to travel overseas, how to write a CV. Giving these young

people the grounding and the focus they need to further their careers is so important, and that's what Melba provides.

I've seen first-hand how the program helps develop young artists – only recently Fleuranne Brockway sang for us, and to experience her development as an artist first-hand has been astounding. I'm just really happy to put my money into something where you can see real concrete improvement.



L–R Étienne Dupuis, Natalie Grimm, Nathan Bryon, Nicole Car, Nathan Breeze and Dr Bruce Caldwell. Image: Anna Kučera

In conversation with Melba mentor Erin Helyard

Erin Helyard is an inspiring conductor, a virtuosic and expressive harpsichordist and fortepianist, and an eminent scholar who is passionate about promoting discourse between musicology and performance.



Photo by Bridget Elliot

As Artistic Director and co-founder of Pinchgut Opera and the Orchestra of the Antipodes (Sydney), he has forged new standards of excellence in historically informed performance in Australia. In the Melba Program, Erin mentors our artists in Baroque and Classical performance practice and ornamentation.

We asked him about his career, his upcoming projects and what inspires him.

What are you currently working on?

I'm currently in the middle of a Musica Viva tour with mandolinist Avi Avital. His colleague Giovanni Solima was unable to make it to Australia as he contracted COVID and I've leapt in at the last minute to help out. But I'm also in the middle of getting ready for the final Pinchgut event of 2022: Charpentier's *Médée*, featuring some Melba alumni. In fact, I met Michael Petrucelli, who is creating the role of Jason, working with Melba when he was an artist.

You mentioned the final Pinchgut event of 2022 – could you tell us a little more about that?

Charpentier's *Medée* of 1693 has often been described as one of the greatest French baroque operas of all time. It was his only work to be presented at the esteemed Académie Royale de Musique in his lifetime and it is a magnificent testament to his genius. The tortured sorceress Medea, who is betrayed by the man she loves and then exacts a ferocious vengeance, has long inspired artists. The libretto by Corneille is still considered today to be one the great masterpieces of French poetry.

This is a very rare opportunity to see this work on the stage, in all its glory.

You've been involved in the Melba Program for a number of years. What are some of your highlights?

All the singers are highly engaged. It is wonderful working with artists who are just on the cusp of a career and honing their talents – it's a joy to be a part of that. Working with Louis Hurley – now a Taryn Fiebig Scholar here at Pinchgut Opera – was a highlight. And witnessing that wonderful, wide-eyed moment when singers are exposed to unfamiliar repertoire, forgotten techniques, or great singers is always very special.

How did you come to be a mentor for Melba?

This was mainly through my work with Sharolyn Kimmorley. I have been coaching singers in this repertoire for almost twenty years now, so I feel like I have lots of insights to pass on. Although one continually keeps learning, and particularly from good students who are passionate about portraying the text.

What wisdom do you try to share with emerging artists?

The importance of rests. The different ways we breathe and how that affects our performance and our line, legato, and above all: text, text, text!

What lessons or advice from the beginning of your career proved most valuable?

That it really isn't about doing what you love, it is about loving what you do. This advice was given to me early on but it has taken years and years to really understand it. Also the most cogent advice of all to me as a young artist –

which is simply, 'be prepared and know your music!' – came from the great Sharolyn Kimmorley, who I have the absolute highest regard for.

Who were your early role models, and how did they influence you?

I met composer Stephen Yates when I first went to Sydney Con. He was the guy at the desk who gave out the keys to the rooms. But he was much more than that. He introduced me to an entire universe of music and I will forever be grateful to him for opening my ears to the music of the past. Stephanie McCallum took me under her wing when I was an undergraduate and we have since become very close friends and colleagues. She has taught me – and continues to teach me – everything I know about playing the piano.

Who are your mentors now?

Stephanie and Stephen are still around and very much in my life. But Richard Tognetti and Lindy Hume have since become close colleagues who I look to for advice and who I deeply admire.

What's your focus for next year?

Now that the borders have reopened and travel is more predictable, I'm looking forward to going to Europe for the first time in many years. I'll be reconnecting with old friends, colleagues and institutions, and doing some talks at some universities (mainly around my newly published book in the Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment series). It will be great to be back in places where baroque opera and baroque singing is flourishing.

Can you tell us about your book?

Clementi and the Woman at the Piano isn't about opera (although the protagonist started his career in opera)

but rather about another passion of mine: the rise of female pianism in the 18th century. If you've ever read a Jane Austen novel, you might remember that women at the time were encouraged to learn to play the keyboard as a 'accomplishment' – something that was counted alongside things like needlepoint and French as a way to catch a roving suitor's eye. Much keyboard music was therefore quite simple, pleasant and easy to play. Difficult music, which required practice, was disdained as unnecessary and pretentious and – for some religious-minded writers – dangerous. An Italian virtuoso keyboardist called Clementi changes all of this. He arrives in London in the 1770s and immediately publishes music that is virtuosic, flashy and thrilling. Despite all the controversies, it becomes a best seller and Clementi soon went on to become one of the great success stories of the international music scene. My book is about Clementi and the rise of female pianism, and along the way I talk about Mozart, Beethoven, the rise of the piano, the rise of the so-called 'work-concept', and huge shifts that occurred in Enlightenment to Romantic music culture, and Clementi's influence on those changes.

From your extraordinary career, which moments have been your proudest?

Barrie Kosky's *Saul* was an enormous highlight, not least because I had to dress up as Handel and emerge from the stage after interval playing a tricky organ concerto on a spinning organ surrounded by 1,000 candles and 15 dancers! Every time I now do something challenging or tricky, I think 'Well, if I can get through *Saul* I can get through anything!'

A letter from abroad

In this regular feature, we ask Melba Alumni to write to us from around the world.

This edition we hear from mezzo-soprano Fleuranne Brockway, recipient of the Annie McFarling Opera Scholarship and the Ruskin Opera Scholarship in 2018, and the Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award in 2021.



Greetings to you all!

It's been a whirlwind few months for me – from role debuts to competitions and lots more.

I've been very focused on my development this year and been lucky to work with incredible talents including bel canto specialist Sherman Lowe. My work with Sherman has completely revolutionised my technique and helped in all of my repertoire.

I received critical acclaim for my first leading role as Charlotte in *Werther* at Hessisches Staatstheater Wiesbaden, and this was shortly followed by my role debut as Dorabella in *Così fan tutte*. I can happily say I'm a much more confident and capable artist now, and this is shining through in my performances.

I recently made a house debut at Oper Frankfurt, stepping into the role of Ciesca in Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* at short notice. I was rehearsing for another role in the south of Italy when I received an email asking if I was available, and the next day I was on a flight to Frankfurt! When I arrived, I walked through the role with the assistant director in a tiny rehearsal space; the following day I was on stage. It was my first jump-in, but thankfully I knew the role very well and I was supported by the wonderful team from the Oper Frankfurt ensemble piece.

I was beyond thrilled to win first place and best female voice at the Concorso Lirico Internazionale in Portofino, a competition run by Francesco Daniel Donati. Only the year before I had entered the competition and made the semi-final. I vividly remember standing next to the stage at the final concert, saying to myself, 'Next year, I'm going to sing here'. And the next year, I did and I won!

It's not often that you have a 'dream come true' moment, but this was certainly one of them. It was a privilege to be singing in front of a panel including people from the Met and La Scala, not to mention performing in one of the most beautiful places in the world. And to be chosen as the winner, let alone the first Australian winner, was just incredible. Winning a competition like this opens a lot of doors. It has been a real launching pad for me.

Two competitions await, I'm honoured to have been chosen to represent Australia for Operalia 2022. Operalia is an international singing competition founded by Plácido Domingo and I'll be heading to Latvia for the final rounds shortly. Then I'll be returning briefly to Australia to compete as a finalist in the Bel Canto Award.

Over the next few months I'll also be preparing my roles for the next season, including Maddalena in *Rigoletto*, Hänsel in *Hänsel und Gretel* and the title role in *Carmen*.

If anyone from the Melba family is visiting Germany next year, be sure to visit Hessisches Staatstheater Wiesbaden and say hello!

Warmest wishes,

Fleuranne



Once a Melba, always a Melba

Alumni Grant Program

Launched in 2021, the Alumni Grant Program provides funding to support continuing artistic development for alumni of the Melba Program. We spoke to two of the inaugural recipients to find out how it assisted them.



Jessica Harper

SOPRANO

Based in Antwerp, Jessica Harper recently made her professional debut as a principal artist in Semperoper Dresden's exciting new opera chasing waterfalls.

chasing waterfalls is the world's first opera in which an artificial intelligence autonomously and in real time composes an aria in the middle of the opera, both the libretto and the music – which makes the experience for the audience, and the performers, slightly different every night!

When Jessica found out she would be making her professional debut in one of the best opera houses in the world, with what she calls 'one of the best orchestras in the world', she told her husband: 'This must be a dream – it's just too good to be true!'

She credits her grant from Melba Opera Trust as a key factor in helping to make this dream a reality.

She used her alumni grant to undertake a postgraduate vocal concert soloist diploma at the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp. Jessica had always wanted to pursue the course, but during lockdown, opportunities to perform were limited, and she found that the money she was making teaching English online was only enough to cover the rent and not much else.

The Melba Alumni Grant meant she could afford to invest in her artistic development, which in turn gave her the confidence to pursue some incredible opportunities, and she graduated from the course *summa cum laude*.

'Not having to worry about the financial element of your study gives you so much more room to be confident and creative in your approach to developing as an artist.'

It was this confidence, Jessica says, that helped her jump on the contract from Dresden as soon as the opportunity emerged towards the end of her studies. The contract came after auditioning for the young artist program in Dresden in 2020. The audition was quite gruelling, involving four arias. As a result of that experience, she was invited to audition for a small role in their *Ring* cycle.

'That petered out due to constant lockdowns, and I thought that was the end of it. Then I got an email out of the blue almost two years later from the person who'd auditioned me for *The Ring* cycle, offering me a role in the new opera I'm performing in now. They remembered my audition from 2020 – one of the four arias I'd sung was the czardas from *Die Fledermaus* – it had struck a chord with them. It just shows how important every audition is – even the ones you thought haven't led to anything.'

Daniel Carison

BARITONE

After three years in the Melba Program and winning the German Australian Opera Grant, Daniel Carison is now principal baritone with the Landestheater Coburg.

Daniel reports:

Certainly, the grant has helped me to regain some momentum now that the industry has started to recover a bit after COVID. There wasn't much professional work going on at that time – and regular coaching was pretty difficult too due to freedom of movement.

As a full-time employee, I was very lucky on the one hand as I was able to continue supporting my family, but creatively I was sort of on a pause. That meant my development stagnated a little. There was a general sense, which I shared with my peers, that we were all getting a bit older but we weren't really getting better. And, of course, development costs money. It's a big investment.

Receiving the grant made a huge difference to me. My time at Melba was a very structured period of my life and

the grant was a really good way for me to get that structure back, enhance some of my skills and use my energy in the right way. It also meant I would be pretty well armed to get back into work.

I used some of the funding to have more regular lessons with a teacher, someone I really gelled with, just to check in on my development and keep the artistic juices flowing. This was absolutely crucial for me, especially as I began to take on more repertoire and the demands on me increased. These lessons helped to ensure that my voice

was coming with me and not working against me.

Another thing the grant helped me with was ensuring that I was really confident – coming out of COVID – that the materials I had to promote myself were really strong. For a singer, your audition materials, including your performance videos and photos, need to really grab attention. I've been working in Germany for 5 years and I've had a variety of experiences with auditions, but most of the time only about 20 per cent of the people you

audition for get back to you, and it's an even lower percentage that you actually get any real job opportunities from an audition. Because there is such a massive amount of competition, the materials you have are really important tools to distinguish yourself.

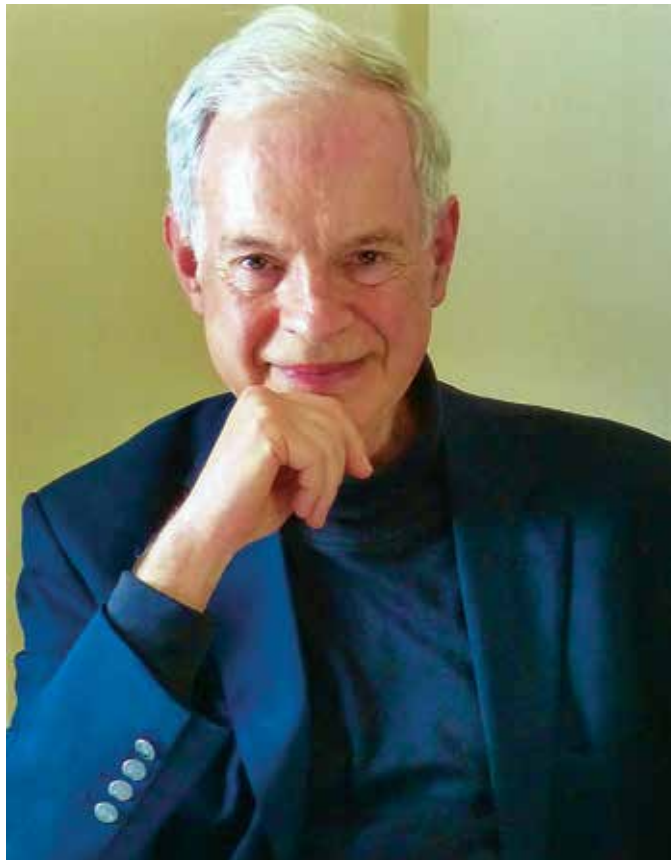
In previous years, I'd been making the videos and putting the materials together myself. They were good quality but there was so much stress involved trying to be a cameraperson, be the performer, and doing all the editing and cuts yourself – it was such a huge undertaking.

So, having access to the grant meant I could invest in getting professional assistance for creating these materials. This in turn meant I could take a step back and just think about being a singer for once!

Other 2021 Alumni Grant recipients include Fiona Jopson, Michael Petruccelli, Xenia Puskarz-Thomas, Shakira Tsindos.

The next round of Alumni Grant recipients will be announced in November 2022.





A very personal bequest

David Ross-Smith pledges to give young singers the support he never had

David Ross-Smith is a lifelong musician, teaching singing in his studio in Glen Iris. He is also a fundraiser for Music for David, a Uniting AgeWell program named after his late partner, which provides music therapy as a support system for people living in their homes with dementia, as well as providing respite for their carers, who are often spouses and partners. He recently made a bequest to Melba Opera Trust – a decision he says comes from a deeply personal place.

‘It sounds strange to say it, but I’ve never been entirely comfortable in the music world,’ says David.

A self-described ‘country kid’, David was born and bred in Ballarat and discovered early on that his musical talents – he had a beautiful treble voice – weren’t always appreciated.

‘I was a sensitive kid, so I didn’t really fit in. I was the target for some pretty unkind jokes and bullying. Sports, not music, was the norm. It was quite a macho environment.’

One of the things that originally attracted David to Melba was the support and encouragement Melba Opera Trust provides to its cohort of young artists.

‘When I was a young man with a musical gift, there just wasn’t the support available to me that the Melba Opera Trust provides. I was anxious and insecure, despite impressive musical achievements, including being named a winner of the state finals of the ABC Instrumental and Vocal Competition in 1968. A number of opportunities presented themselves to me after that, including being offered a scholarship to the Royal College of Music in London, but at the time I just didn’t have the confidence or the support behind me to go to London. The Melba Artists have that – they are given the opportunity to develop “more than a voice” – the skills

you need as a young artist to thrive in uncertain or unfamiliar environments.’

David suffered for some time with acute performance anxiety – before a performance he would often be so anxious that a memory lapse would occur. Later, he discovered he was clinically depressed and had been for most of his early life.

‘At that time, there wasn’t the same support or even recognition of mental health that there is now. There was no encouragement or thought that I should receive counselling. Organisations like Melba, which challenge artists to improve and succeed while at the same time supporting them and advocating for the importance of mental health, are so important for the development of young talent.’

He has been interested in the Melba Opera Trust for some time and was always impressed by the values it embodied, but after being invited to attend a masterclass taught by Simon O’Neill, something really clicked.

‘Attending that class opened my eyes to what sets the Melba Opera Trust apart. Challenging and supporting young artists in equal measure, preparing them for the pressure of performing to an audience but nurturing them at the same time – that’s a difficult balance to strike, but Melba has achieved it.’

David was inspired by his experience to make a bequest to Melba Opera Trust.

He has stipulated that this bequest be used to support young singers and pianists in an area of music he has a particular interest in – not only in operatic repertoire but also other vocal repertoire such as Lieders.

‘There’s a family feeling to Melba that comes from the top and is evident at every level of the organisation,’ he says. ‘From the artists to the donors, we all feel fully embraced by the organisation. That sense of mutual support and inclusivity is not something I’ve always encountered in the music world. The organisation is doing great things, and I hope my support goes some way to helping Melba Opera Trust to continue

helping young artists to thrive well into the future.’

David’s foresight and generosity will be acknowledged through the Melba’s Will bequest circle, which was inspired by Dame Nellie Melba’s own extraordinary act of founding philanthropy. Melba’s Will allows us to thank those who notify us of a bequest by inviting them to join special occasions, observe our program and artists in action, meet visiting mentors and enjoy first-hand the opportunities their legacy will help to preserve.

To find out more about Melba’s Will or making a bequest to Melba Opera Trust, please contact Amy Black ablack@melbaoperatrust.com.au

Organisations like Melba ... challenge artists to improve and succeed while at the same time supporting them and advocating for the importance of mental health



Filipe Manu announced as 2022 Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award recipient



Established in 2013, the Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award provides funding to refine and mature an already evident operatic talent from Australia or New Zealand.

This year's recipient, New Zealand-Tongan tenor Filipe Manu, is currently on a salaried contract ('fest') in Switzerland. It is his final year on contract; following this he goes freelance.

'I'm so thankful for this award,' says Filipe. 'As a singer, moving into the freelance stage of your career can be an exciting, if not a daunting prospect. I have a number of important contracts coming up where I'll be going into a room with seasoned professionals, some of whom will be on their tenth-

plus production. This award has given me the financial backing to make sure I'm as prepared as I possibly can be to do the roles I've won justice.'

Filipe explained that when you start off as a freelance artist, there is the excitement of being able to increase your repertoire, build experience and gain access to a wider variety of roles, but those opportunities come with significant financial pressures.

'You work so hard to come through the ranks to win these roles at important opera houses. But to truly be successful in these roles you need to be prepared for significant upfront costs – working on language, musical coaching, vocal training with your teacher and any other requirements a role might need. I've seen first-hand the level of performance required even in the first rehearsal for some of these roles, where you're working alongside seasoned professionals – you don't want to be underprepared. You want to be able to meet that level.'

Dame Heather Begg's own long and distinguished international operatic career guided her desire to make a provision in her will to establish this valuable singing award. Following



You don't want to be underprepared when you're working alongside seasoned professionals. This award will ensure I can do justice to the roles I've won

her death, the trustees of her estate established the Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award with Melba Opera Trust.

Trustee Moffatt Oxenbould AM said:

We are proud that the Dame Heather Begg Award has been of particular benefit to young artists who have already taken significant steps in their professional careers. Filipe is a very fine artist of already considerable achievement and immense potential who deserves every assistance to ensure that he is impeccably prepared for the major roles he is undertaking for the first time.

Filipe is a graduate of the highly regarded Jette Parker Artists Programme at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. For the past year, Filipe has been a member of the ensemble of Konzert Theater Bern, and later this year he will sing Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte* at Covent Garden. Earlier this year, he won the prestigious Lexus Song Quest in New Zealand.

Previous winners of the Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award include Samuel Dundas, Janet Todd, Jeremy Kleeman, Amina Edris, Emily Edmonds, Lauren Fagan, Nicholas Jones and Fleuranne Brockway.

International guests make a welcome return to Melba

Our August module marked the long-awaited return of many of our regular international visitors.

American director Chuck Hudson, a protégé of Marcel Marceau, joined us to present an intensive one-week program called Stagecraft for Singers, focused on movement, stagecraft and character development.

Providing a vibrant approach to operatic storytelling, Chuck instilled in the artists presence of character and commitment to the text. We are grateful to the Angior Family Foundation for supporting Chuck's involvement in this year's program.

Joining us from the UK, Linnhe Robertson provided several individual vocal coaching sessions with the artists.

Linnhe has worked extensively in major music centres throughout the world as a vocal coach, repetiteur, accompanist and harpsichordist.

We were also delighted to welcome back vocal coach and teacher Yvonne Kenny AM, one of our very first mentors in the program, who provided individual coaching and shared a special morning tea with donors.

In addition to her busy teaching schedule, Yvonne works closely with the Jette Parker Artists Programme of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden and is Chairman of the Australian Music Foundation UK.

Our thanks extends to the following supporters of the Mentor Program: Reilly & Logie-Smith Mentor Endowment, John & Elizabeth Wright Smith, Robert Salzer Foundation and the Angior Family Foundation.



Top: Chuck Hudson with Samantha Hargreaves
Above left: Linnhe Robertson and Tom Nicholson
Above right: Yvonne Kenny. Images: David Ng

A fitting new home for one of Nellie Melba’s most treasured possessions

Two very special partners of Melba Opera Trust, Ryman Healthcare and Coombe Yarra Valley, recently worked together to give Dame Nellie Melba’s famous billiards table a new lease of life!

For more than a century, Dame Nellie Melba’s billiards table remained inside Coombe Cottage, the 19th-century Coldstream homestead she called home. Now the custom-made table has been lovingly refurbished by Alcocks (the company that built it for Dame Nellie in 1920) and given a new lease of life at a Melbourne retirement village named in the great diva’s honour.

Ryman Healthcare, which operates the Nellie Melba Retirement Village in Wheelers Hill, purchased the table from Coombe Cottage so its residents would have a piece of Melba history to call their own. Residents have already been putting the table to good use – with billiards now a regular fixture at the retirement village.

Ryman’s Communications and External Relations Manager Michael Cummings said that when he was approached by Coombe Cottage about the possibility of buying the table, it felt like the ‘perfect fit’. ‘Not only do our residents now have a magnificent billiards table, but they can also say “This was Dame Nellie’s, she played on it with her friends, and now we have a small piece of her history to enjoy and share with others”’



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