

EDITION 13 SPRING 2015

SPREADING THEIR WINGS —
MELBAS ACROSS THE CONTINENTS

OUR MELBOURNE RECITAL
CENTRE DEBUT

MINDING MELBA'S MEMORIAL

Jeremy Kleeman, Alexandra Flood and Nicholas Tolputt

The Melba

Magazine of Melba Opera Trust

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A NOTE FROM THE
MANAGING DIRECTOR

ONE OF MELBA OPERA TRUST'S MOST PRECIOUS ASSETS — OUR INDEPENDENCE — UNDERPINS A HIGH DEGREE OF AGILITY AND FLEXIBILITY TO COLLABORATE WITH A VARIETY OF LIKE-MINDED ORGANISATIONS.



This capacity to take advantage of opportunities for the benefit of our scholars has resulted in some valuable experiences for our young singers.

Our blossoming relationship with the **Melbourne Symphony** is providing access to some of the world's top singers that they bring to Melbourne. Recently, four of our scholars sang for opera star Renée Fleming in a closed master class. Our new partnership with the **Melbourne Recital Centre** provided two exciting concert opportunities for seven of our current and past scholars. Four of our singers partnered with four pianists from the **Australian National Academy of Music** for a master class of art song.

Collaborations of a different nature are providing important opportunities for our Endowment Campaign. Our Sydney Friend Raising efforts were given a huge boost courtesy of a new relationship with **Sotheby's Australia**. Sotheby's hosted our annual Dame Heather Begg Award soirée amidst

a stunning exhibition of *Important Australian Art*. And of course our well-established partnerships with the likes of **De Bortoli, Coombe the Melba Estate, Mantra, Deloitte** and **DLA Piper** continue to provide indispensable support to Melba Opera Trust operations and activities.



Scholars **Daniel Carison, Nikki Hill, Morgan Balfour & Associate Repetiteur Stefan Cassomenos** with **Renée Fleming**

And speaking of precious assets, our General Manager Amy Black and her husband Clayton recently became the proud parents of Charlotte Grace. From all reports, Charlotte possesses a powerful — if high — soprano voice.

Our Acting General Manager, Olivia Giglia, has skillfully and energetically taken on the leadership of the Trust's engine room.

Onward!

Peter Garnick
Managing Director



Renée Fleming

WELCOME OUR
ACTING GENERAL
MANAGER:
OLIVIA GIGLIA



WHILE OUR FEARLESS LEADER, AMY BLACK, IS BEING KEPT BUSY IN THE WINGS WITH HER NEW BUNDLE OF JOY, THE ROLE OF ACTING GENERAL MANAGER HAS BEEN MORE THAN ABLY FILLED BY OLIVIA GIGLIA.

Olivia explains what drew her to the role. “To be perfectly honest, I hadn’t heard of Melba Opera Trust before the role opened and it was Mary Jo Capps, CEO of Musica Viva who recommended it to me. And I’m most grateful she did! After some due diligence, I discovered an impeccably-run, lean, straight-shooting organisation making impressive headway against the odds with a track record of sparkling alumni, an active board of directors, consultative management team, a dazzling industry network, insightful artistic leadership, clear strategic direction, a clearly engaged community of supporters and an infectious forward moving energy. Where do I sign?!

Fortunately for me, there was a decision to make, and a very easy one in the end. I’m thrilled to be here, even if only for a short time.”

As is always complementary to the integrity of Melba Opera Trust, Olivia comes from a musical background along with some impressive career highlights to her name. “An undergraduate degree in music education has underpinned my ongoing passion for music and learning and during a diverse career to date, the unifying thread is attraction to roles that involve interaction with people to achieve and celebrate all sorts of things. I’ve been fortunate to work within tremendous Australian arts

organisations such as Musica Viva, Melbourne Festival and Australian Youth Orchestra, juxtaposed with large government events coordinated within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, for the APEC 2007 Taskforce and Australia 2020 Summit. And now at Melba Opera Trust, I am being exposed to the opera world of music more intimately and it absolutely satisfies my loves of music, learning and interacting with people.”

And while leading the charge, Olivia has a clear vision for “keeping Melba Opera Trust on its current upward trajectory for a seamless hand-back to Amy Black next June.”

“As I discover more about the opera world, I understand the responsibility that Melba Opera Trust has in maintaining a strong three-pillared program of learning development for Australia’s best young opera singers, in Australia. The networks, business skills, vocal coaching, tailored advice, performance opportunities and funding that the Trust avails each of its scholars, builds a solid platform to propel their careers in Australia and internationally.”

ABOUT
MELBA OPERA TRUST



MELBA OPERA TRUST IS AUSTRALIA'S PREMIER SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM FOR PROMISING YOUNG OPERA SINGERS. DRIVEN BY DAME NELLIE MELBA'S CONVICTION “A BEAUTIFUL VOICE IS NOT ENOUGH”, THE PROGRAM NURTURES ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT ALONGSIDE BUSINESS TRAINING, MENTORING AND PERFORMANCE EXPERIENCE. WE ARE THE NEXT STEP FOR SINGERS PREPARING TO BECOME PROFESSIONALS ON THE WORLD STAGE.

Inspiring Excellence — Realising Potential — Forging Careers

FRIEND-RAISING IN SYDNEY

THANKS TO DAME NELLIE MELBA CALLING THE BEAUTIFUL YARRA VALLEY IN VICTORIA HER HOME, MELBOURNE HAS BEEN THE NATURAL PLACE FOR MELBA OPERA TRUST’S ENGINE ROOM TO OPERATE. HOWEVER, OUR SCHOLARS COME FROM FOUR DIFFERENT STATES THIS YEAR AND MELBA’S STUNNING LEGACY LIVES IN THE HEART OF ALL AUSTRALIANS.

AND SO, WITH AN AMBITION TO INCREASE MELBA OPERA TRUST’S PRESENCE IN RECOGNITION OF THE WORK OUR MENTORS AND SCHOLARS ALIKE INVEST, WE ARE THRILLED TO HAVE SHARED TWO SPECIAL EVENTS WITH NEW FRIENDS OUTSIDE OF VICTORIA.

MASTER DUO

“AS ALWAYS, MELBA OPERA TRUST SINGERS WERE WELL PREPARED AND AT EASE IN FRONT OF THE AUDIENCE. THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SINGERS TO TAKE PART IN A PUBLIC MASTER CLASS LIKE THIS IS UNIQUE TO MELBA OPERA TRUST, AND WILL BE INVALUABLE TO THE SINGERS AS THEY BEGIN TO FORGE THEIR CAREERS.”

Cheryl Barker AO



Nicholas Tolputt, accompanist Siro Battaglin, Nikki Hill, Peter Coleman-Wright AO, Zoe Drummond and Cheryl Barker AO

“IT IS IMPORTANT FOR SINGERS TO BE ABLE TO ADAPT TO ANY CIRCUMSTANCE WHEN PERFORMING. THIS MASTER CLASS INVOLVED SINGING IN FRONT OF PEOPLE AT CLOSE RANGE, AND WORKING WITH THAT SCRUTINY IS FAR MORE DIFFICULT THAN PEOPLE WOULD IMAGINE. I WAS IMPRESSED WITH THE WAY OUR THREE SINGERS HANDLED THEMSELVES AND WERE OPEN TO CRITICAL ANALYSIS.”

Peter Coleman-Wright AO

In Melba Opera Trust’s first Sydney event for 2015, a distinguished group of invited guests gathered at an exclusive Rose Bay venue to observe three current scholars ‘In Master Class’ with two of Australia’s most celebrated opera singers, soprano Cheryl Barker AO and baritone Peter Coleman-Wright AO. Sydney-based scholars, sopranos Zoe Drummond and Nikki Hill, together with the Trust’s first counter-tenor, Nicholas Tolputt, provided a ‘behind

the scenes’ insight into aspects of what it takes to develop a successful opera-singing career. Following some brief introductory remarks about Melba Opera Trust from Chairman Robert Logie-Smith, our singers, accompanied by Opera Australia repetiteur and vocal coach Siro Battaglin, laid themselves open to constructive critique of their art.

Nicholas Tolputt provided his thoughts on the event. “This was a very exciting and valuable, if nerve-wracking experience for me. A public master class is obviously more exposing than a regular concert or recital. You have to be prepared to have your performance analysed, and with Melba Opera Trust, this often means being critiqued by some of the keenest musical ears and minds around. Cheryl Barker and Peter Coleman-Wright certain fall into this category. Fortunately for Nikki, Zoe and me, they were both constructive and passionate with their feedback. It really felt as though they were there to help us succeed, rather than to focus only on areas for improvement. This immediately put me at ease. Thankfully, the audience was also incredibly supportive.”

For Nicholas, there was a particularly exciting outcome. “I sang ‘Dove sei, amato bene?’ from Handel’s opera *Rodelinda*, and worked predominantly with Peter. I found this feedback helped me to such an extent that I became hooked. I was so interested in his approach to the voice, that after the event I approached him to ask about the possibility of private lessons, and he agreed! So now I can continue the work done during this wonderful master class. Opportunities such as this just would not surface if it weren’t for the Melba program!”

Cheryl “enjoyed working with the singers”, and expressed her pride in being associated with Melba Opera Trust, and in having the opportunity to pass on the knowledge and experience gained throughout her career. Peter added that Melba Opera Trust provides “a fabulous platform for emerging artists to hone their respective talents”.

Following the master class, guests were invited to enjoy refreshments, to debrief with the masters and scholars, and to find out more about Melba Opera Trust’s activities.

2015 SCHOLAR UPDATES



DANIEL CARISON

- Received an encouragement award at the German-Australian Opera Grant
- Featured ensemble member in Victorian Opera’s *Sweeney Todd*
- Presented Schubert’s *Winterreise* in August to a standing ovation



MORGAN BALFOUR

- Received an encouragement award at the German-Australian Opera Grant
- Received 3rd prize in the Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyngé Bel Canto Award
- Is working towards the Lisa Gasteen National Opera School to be held in November on full scholarship



SHAUNTAI BATZKE

- Recently performed at the inauguration of the 29th Governor of Victoria at Government House
- Accepted into and participated in the Canto de las Americas summer programme in New York working with artists from The Met

DUET OF MUSIC AND ART AT SOTHEBY’S

MUSIC AND ART ALWAYS GO BEAUTIFULLY TOGETHER, AND THIS WAS PARTICULARLY SO AT SOTHEBY’S SYDNEY ON A RAINY SUNDAY EVENING IN AUGUST.

For the second Sydney event in 2015, Melba Opera Trust partnered with Sotheby’s Australia to present a musical program against the backdrop of a wonderful exhibition of *Important Australian Art*.

From Melba Opera Trust’s point of view, the collaboration with Sotheby’s was idyllic. Sotheby’s CEO and Director Gary Singer was equally delighted with the partnership. “As a long-time supporter of numerous artistic organisations, Sotheby’s Australia was honoured to be entrusted with the recent sale of property from the collection of the late Dame Nellie Melba GBE. It was the first time since her death in 1931 that the public had an opportunity to acquire items from her collection. This sale inspired us to support Melba Opera Trust with their fundraising endeavours, and to provide Trust supporters with an opportunity to view privately-owned *Important Australian Art* rarely seen by the public. We are inspired by Melba, as she believed very strongly in giving back to the community that supported her in what ever way she could.”

As the baby grand piano, generously loaned by Hutchings Pianos, assumed its rightful position before an extremely valuable painting of a couple ballroom dancing by celebrated Australian artist John Brack, the surroundings seemed ideal for the program about to be performed by Melba alumni, soprano Janet Todd

and tenor Matthew Reardon, with accompanist Siro Battaglin. When the intimate space of Sotheby’s gallery in Queen St, Woollahra began to fill with invited guests, it was clear the evening would be special.

Following Gary’s welcome, Melba Opera Trust Chairman, Robert Logie-Smith, took the opportunity to explain the organisation’s raison d’être and mission. Janet, Matthew and Siro then made their entrance to perform works by Handel, Donizetti, Mozart, Tchaikovsky, Massenet and Bizet. The program ended on a lighter note with some songs from musical theatre; Janet’s rendition of ‘I could have danced all night’ from *My Fair Lady* was particularly apt against the backdrop of Brack’s ‘dancing’ painting.

Janet Todd is the recipient of the 2015 Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award, and, as she was back in Australia for a few weeks during a break in her studies at the Manhattan School of Music, this event provided an ideal opportunity for her award to be publicly acknowledged. As the applause died down, one of three Trustees of Dame Heather Begg’s estate, former Artistic Director of Opera Australia, Moffat Oxenbould AM, rose from his chair to congratulate Janet and to address the audience. He explained that the award, presented in association with Melba Opera Trust, is offered each year to a young singer from Australia or New Zealand to

provide funding for travel and tuition to refine and mature an already-evident operatic talent. Needless to say, the award has greatly assisted Janet in furthering her art overseas.

“It has been of incredible assistance in my first year studying at the Manhattan School of Music, contributing to my college fees and the costs of living in New York City. My gratitude is immeasurable, as I would otherwise not have been able to afford to study at this world-class institution in one of the most culturally-rich and exciting cities in the world. And the training I’ve received in my first year of my master’s course in New York has already been extremely beneficial. It was lovely to have the award acknowledged in this intimate event at Sotheby’s in a room full of beautiful artworks, and before an audience that included people who have contributed to my artistic development. And it was such a pleasure to perform alongside my talented colleagues Matthew and Siro.”

Both Sotheby’s and Melba Opera Trust concur that the event was a great success. As Gary eloquently offered, “Sotheby’s Australia finds the Melba Opera Trust’s aims for the furthering of Australian operatic talent inspirational. The event was a wonderfully joyous occasion of art, food and wine complementing an outstanding operatic performance. The experience of hearing such talented performers

surrounded by exemplary Australian art made for a truly memorable occasion.”



Moffat Oxenbould AM, Janet Todd, Matthew Reardon and Robert Logie Smith



Jane Douglass, Cynthia Jackson AM and Gary Singer



Tom and Christine Hughes

SCHOLAR UPDATES CONTINUED...



ZOE DRUMMOND

- Recently travelled to China with *The 7 Sopranos*
- Performed in master class with international opera star, Renée Fleming at Sydney Opera House



JADE MOFFAT

- Was a finalist in the Sydney Eisteddfod McDonald's Aria competition
- Has relocated to London to take up a full scholarship at the Guildhall School of Music



NIKKI HILL

- Continues to develop her craft under the guidance of Glenn Winslade
- Made her Melbourne Recital Centre debut with Melba Opera Trust in *Baroque to Broadway*
- Performed in an open master class with renowned Australian soprano, Yvonne Kenny AM & international opera star, Renée Fleming



NICHOLAS TOLPUTT

- Made his Melbourne Recital Centre debut with Melba Opera Trust in *'To Music'*
- Performed in an open master class for Cheryl Barker AO & Peter Coleman-Wright AO
- Preparing for an upcoming recital in Tasmania and a number of oratorios at the end of 2015



JEREMY KLEEMAN

- Announced as a finalist in the upcoming IFAC Australian Singing Competition
- A featured artist in Victorian Opera's critically praised concert performance of Bellini's opera, *I puritani*, and in the ensemble for *Sweeney Todd*
- Has been cast in Musica Viva's chamber opera *Voyage to the Moon* alongside soprano Emma Matthews and mezzo-soprano Sally-Anne Russell, in partnership with Victorian Opera



(Photo credit — Belinda Strodder)

STEFAN CASSOMENOS

- Premiered his composition *Requiem for the End of Time* at Deakin Edge with the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic, featuring scholar Daniel Carison, and Stefan's contemporary chamber ensemble PLEXUS
- Performed Rachmaninov's *Paganini Rhapsody* as soloist with the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Orchestra, at Melbourne Town Hall in late September
- Performing an international solo recital tour, giving concerts throughout the United Kingdom and in Germany



LEARNING THE BIZ A MOMENT WITH OUR MENTORS

EVERY MELBA OPERA TRUST SCHOLARSHIP INCLUDES PARTICIPATION IN THE MENTOR PROGRAM, PROVIDING UNPARALLELED AND REALISTIC INSIGHTS TO THE INDUSTRY AND BUSINESS OF OPERA PERFORMANCE. EXPECTATIONS OF PROFESSIONAL SINGERS IN AUSTRALIA AND OVERSEAS ARE EXAMINED, PRACTISED AND REFINED THROUGH A DIVERSE SELECTION OF MENTOR PROGRAM SESSIONS.

HERE WE SHINE THE SPOTLIGHT ON INDUSTRY EXPERTS ENGAGED BY MELBA OPERA TRUST AND THE CONTRIBUTIONS THEIR YEARS OF EXPERIENCE BRING TOWARDS POLISHING AUSTRALIA'S MOST PROMISING YOUNG OPERA SINGERS.

'AT HOME' WITH ORATORIO: JONATHAN GRIEVES-SMITH



Jonathan Grieves-Smith

"EVERY OPERA SINGER IS ALSO GOING TO SING ORATORIO. I WANTED TO GIVE A SENSE OF WHAT SINGERS NEED TO DO WHEN SINGING ON THE CONCERT STAGE RATHER THAN THE OPERA STAGE, BECAUSE THE STYLE IS VERY DIFFERENT. SIMPLICITY IS PARAMOUNT, AND IT'S REALLY VERY IMPORTANT TO CONCENTRATE ON THE COMBINATION OF TEXT AND EXTRAORDINARY PITCHES."

In June, a master class in oratorio and choral music was offered for the first time. Our scholars had the opportunity to develop their artistry in a session led by former Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (MSO) Chorus Master and current Director of Music at Melbourne University's Trinity College, Jonathan Grieves-Smith. Jonathan has an outstanding reputation as a conductor of vocal works, both here in Australia and in his native UK.

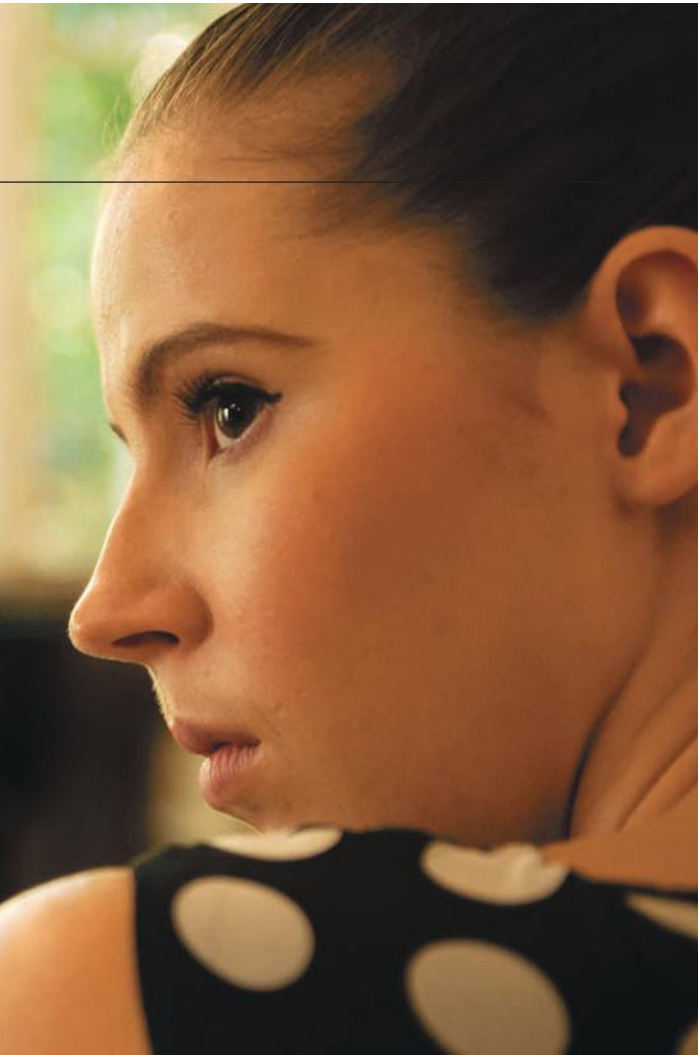
Jonathan stressed the importance of being equally at home on the concert and opera stages. "Everyone wants to perform opera, and that's fine. But these young singers, with their good voices, bags of talent and great futures, can add a third to their workload by being smart in the concert hall. It's about concentrating on very simple things, and simplicity is hard."

He also especially focused on the importance of text. "It really is about going back to the text, which I think is most lost by singers who come from the opera stage to the concert hall. They need to think about how the composer has expressed the text, and how to capture the atmosphere of the story and convey it. It's incredibly intense. For example, you can't suddenly throw up your arms when you're about to sing a note that you might have a tendency to sing out of tune: you can't divert the audience. I've certainly seen singers who are very good on stage, but clearly uncomfortable on the

concert platform. It works the other way around too: a singer can be just wonderful in concert, and as robotic as can be imagined on the opera stage. But it's important to remember that the two play off each other. There could be moments when an opera director says, "Can you just stand still and sing it?" If you've never done any concert work, that's not an easy thing to do."

Aside from text, Jonathan has also had other aims. "I was trying to give them another seven ways of thinking about any moment in the music. Young singers need a suite of possibilities as to how to react to those words, to that atmosphere, to that speed a conductor sets, and when something goes wrong."

Of the experience. "It was a lovely atmosphere. I felt the scholars really took some things on — some pennies will drop later, and some things they will discard — and quite rightly. I loved working with them, and I look forward to the opportunity to do so again."



VOCAL HEALTH: DR DEBBIE PHYLAND

DEBBIE IS A SPEECH PATHOLOGIST WITH OVER 25 YEARS EXPERIENCE, AND CO-OWNER OF THE MELBOURNE VOICE ANALYSIS CENTRE.

A singer herself, she has a particular interest in working with the singing voice, and has mentored our scholars a number of times in vocal health. We caught up with her recently during a very busy period in Sydney around the premiere of *Matilda the Musical*, for which she is Head of Voice.

Firstly, can you tell me about your specialisation and what motivates you?

I am a long-time singer myself, and a speech pathologist, so the combination of vocal physiology and the health of the performance voice followed on naturally. I have just completed my PhD investigating the impact of heavy vocal load on the vocal folds of professional singers. I am fascinated by the incredible ability of the folds to endure the repetitive vibrations involved in voicing, to recover from mild and even moderate phonotrauma, and by the interplay of the psychological, emotional and physical factors that influence vocal resilience.

Could you explain what you try to cover in your mentor sessions with the scholars?

I cover vocal health, vocal efficiency and wellbeing; I try to balance the art and the science. Coping with sometimes heavy performance

loads requires care, vocal fitness, training and conditioning for optimal management of the airway and vocal tract, as well as for endurance and reliability. I provide the scholars with the evidence-base to support these aspects and hopefully dispel some of the many myths that exist in the singing world about how to look after the voice. I also give exercises and tips for warming up, cooling down and for managing the voice when it is under par.

How important to these young singers is an awareness of maintaining vocal health?

It's crucial to ensuring that they develop technique and stamina without impediment, so that they can continue to do what they do well.

And your thoughts on the Mentor Program...

I think the Mentor Program is fabulous. I've been impressed by the thoughtful planning and comprehensive coverage of all aspects of performance and wellbeing, from psychology to stagecraft to vocal health, and beyond. I find the personalities, voice characteristics and different motivations diverse and interesting, and continue to enjoy my involvement.



Sam Hunt with scholars Jade and Nicholas

‘MUSIC MAKERS’ AND THE MEDIA: MAIRI NICOLSON

“MUSIC, RADIO AND THE WIDER WORLD OF THE ARTS ARE MY ONGOING PASSIONS. IN MY RADIO CAREER, I’VE ALWAYS SEEN MY ROLE TO MAKE CLASSICAL MUSIC, MUSICIANS AND SINGERS AS ACCESSIBLE AS POSSIBLE TO THE WIDEST AUDIENCE. TO THAT END, I NOW ALSO PROVIDE MEDIA TRAINING WITH MUSICIANS SO THEY HAVE THE SKILLS TO TALK ABOUT THEIR LIVES AND PASSIONS AS MUSICIANS AND TELL THEIR STORIES.”

Mairi graduated from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, majoring in piano and singing, and has a 30-year career as a broadcaster for the ABC and BBC. Her passion for classical music has given her a unique breadth of experience as a public speaker and radio host closely connected with musicians and singers — the perfect person to provide media training to Melba scholars in the Mentor Program, which she has been doing since 2011.

How important is it to help these young artists gain some media savvy?

It's vital for young musicians in the competitive 21st century! Every media opportunity is a gift with great potential, and if they prepare in the same way they do for their concerts, and know what they want to achieve from the encounter, they can get great results in terms of exposure and audience interest in their concerts.

Can you share with us what you do in your sessions with the scholars?

We cover different media situations including effective presentation of concerts from the stage, how to pitch talks to different audiences, and how to prepare and drive a variety of media interviews, including print, radio and social media. Interestingly, over the years in my work conducting practical workshops in the ABC radio studios at Southbank, I've had many students who have potential as radio presenters/interviewers. Oh, that the ABC had a succession plan that would facilitate their access!

How do you pitch your material to young, aspiring opera singers, as opposed to other musicians?

I also do media training with instrumentalists and young conductors. In general I find singers are more extrovert personalities, who are often blessed with beautiful speaking voices and are natural communicators, making them well suited to media encounters. The main issues are using appropriate language for their specific audiences (i.e. not too technical), and working out the most effective way to tell the convoluted stories of opera plots and arias, as well as their own stories.



Mairi Nicolson with celebrated bass-baritone and past Melba Mentor, Bryn Terfel.

And your thoughts on the Mentor Program...

I've found it a privilege to work with many talented young scholars over the years, and they all present with an astounding range of experiences and skills. Highly-trained musicians with acutely trained aural skills, they all have the potential to be successful in a variety of media situations. I think the program is unique in Australia, and obviously very successful given the career trajectories of a number of alumni. I wish Melba Opera Trust had been around when I was training to be a singer at the Sydney Con last century!

I believe your involvement with the Mentor Program has motivated you to feature Melba Opera Trust in your hour-long ‘Music Makers’ program on ABC Classic FM?

Yes! In a special feature to air later this year, we're planning to focus on Melba Opera Trust and the unique role it plays in Australia in nurturing future opera singers. We will be tracing the story behind the Trust and Dame Nellie Melba's vision to support young talented singers, as well as eavesdropping on some of the Trust workshops and speaking with a few of the impressive line-up of mentors. We also want to follow some of the Trust's past scholars, and highlight the impact the Trust has had on their careers to date. Not surprisingly, the accompanying soundtrack will include recordings of some of the scholars made this year in The Salon at Melbourne Recital Centre, as well as Melba herself!

Music Makers is broadcast on ABC Classic FM at midday on Saturdays. It is presented by Mairi Nicolson, and produced by Melissa May. abc.net.au/classic/program/musicmakers/

FINANCIAL KNOW-HOW

Richard Thomas, partner in the accounting firm Jeffrey Thomas & Partners, has been part of our Mentor Program for over five years now. He is a singer himself, and years ago his father impressed on him the importance of business skills. “I have trained in voice for over 25 years, and completed my A Mus A. Early in my singing career, my father (also an accountant), stressed to me the importance of commerciality in the Arts: that I needed to know how to negotiate contracts, deal with agents, keep good records, and build a good network of followers. This background has certainly assisted me to engage with the scholars and impart wisdom from my ‘real life’ experiences.”

Richard has a clear agenda for his seminars. “I aim to provide the singers with a survival kit for when they are freelancing as young artists. I cover topics such as income tax, GST, contract negotiations, managing cash flows, and international issues for when they travel abroad. We also explore common themes around deductibility of car costs, travel, musical equipment and tuition. I try to keep the message simple: accounting and tax are not for everyone! And I give them the opportunity to ask lots of questions. The cost of professional advice is often prohibitive for young artists; therefore I try to leave them with a good understanding of the basics.”

Recommended by Richard, Sam Hunt of Warr Hunt Financial and Wealth Managers made his Melba debut with a session on financial planning in June this year. This was not exactly new terrain for Sam, as Warr Hunt undertakes a great deal of education about financial planning in the entertainment industry. Sam is not a singer himself, but attends opera and loves musicals, often taking his children along as well. Interestingly, through his new connection with Melba Opera Trust, he has just discovered that his great grandmother, Dame Hilda Stevenson (née McKay) shared a voice coach — Mary Ellen Christian at PLC — with Dame Nellie!

Like Richard, Sam feels it is essential for singers to consider their work as a business, and applauds the Trust's inclusion of such skills in the Mentor Program. “I think it's a terrific program.

It's really important to introduce concepts about managing cash flow early on, especially since income doesn't necessarily come in at a steady rate. But there are steps to take to manage better in those situations, which include knowing how much money they need to live on, and saving for those times when it's a bit bumpy. Also, sometimes the big dreams don't pan out, and they need something to fall back on. These things are not taught in schools, so it's good that the Trust is getting in relatively early with these young singers. Some artists think it's a bit vulgar to talk about business, but the Melba scholars were definitely attuned to the fact that it's a necessity. If you get the foundations right from the beginning, it just sets you up: it really does.”

SPREADING THEIR WINGS:

MELBAS ON THE MAP

‘BONJOUR’, ‘MORNING GOVERNOR’ AND EVEN ‘ALOHA’ ARE SOME OF THE DAILY GREETINGS THAT HAVE BECOME PART OF THE LIVES OF OUR SCHOLARS AND ALUMNI ALIKE AS THEIR HORIZONS HAVE BEEN BROADENED BEYOND OUR AUSTRALIAN SHORES. DEVELOPMENT IN THEIR CAREERS ARE SEEING OUR ARTISTS TAKING UP RESIDENCY IN FRANCE, THE UK AND THE UNITED STATES, EXTENDING DAME NELLIE MELBA’S INTERNATIONAL LEGACY ACROSS THE CONTINENTS AND KEEPING IT FIRMLY ON THE MAP.



Alumna Stacey Alleaume with Marilyn Horne

STAR-SPANGLED MELBAS

In an interview for *The Melba* in 2012, renowned Australian tenor and Melba Mentor Stuart Skelton encouraged Australian singers aiming to study overseas to broaden their thinking to include American institutions as well as those in European centres. Now based in the US himself, Stuart’s opinion was that there exists in the US “exactly the sort of ‘exceptionalism’ that is being engendered by Melba Opera Trust”. It seems that our singers are certainly taking Skelton’s advice, with four of our alumni and current scholars undertaking study in America in 2015.



Alumna Janet Todd

Soprano Janet Todd, recipient of the Beleura-Tallis Opera Scholarship with Melba Opera Trust in 2010, 2011 and 2012, has just completed her first year of a two-year opera master’s program at the Manhattan School of Music in New York, assisted by her Dame Heather Begg Award alongside her vocal scholarship.

“I was involved in several performances in my first year, but the highlight was singing the soprano solo in Mozart’s *Great Mass in C Minor* with the Manhattan School of Music Choir and Orchestra. I have a wonderful teacher, Maitland Peters, and we’ve made a great deal of progress over the first year. I’m really excited about continuing this in my second year.”

Three other singers, including alumna Stacey Alleaume and current scholars Morgan Balfour and Shauntai Batzke, have recently attended summer schools and festivals in the US.

STACEY ALLEAUME: MUSIC ACADEMY OF THE WEST, SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA: JUNE – AUGUST 2015

The Music Academy of the West was founded in 1947 by a group of visionary southern Californian arts patrons and musicians, including legendary soprano Lotte Lehmann and famed conductor Otto Klemperer. It aims to develop the next generation of great classical musicians, and to cultivate discerning, appreciative and adventurous audiences. Director of the Voice Program is none other than celebrated American mezzo-soprano, Marilyn Horne. From among 550 applicants, only 23 are invited to enrol in this distinguished program.

We were coached in singing technique, diction, interpretation, style and presentation, and had the opportunity to explore the literature of opera, musical theatre and song. I was involved in many performances, two of which were real highlights for me.

The first was a vocal chamber concert, where I had the opportunity to collaborate with two of the world’s leading collaborative pianists — Martin Katz and John Churchwell — in preparing Argento’s *Six Elizabethan Songs* with harpsichord, violin, cello, flute and oboe. Performing with instrumentalists, especially in a chamber music context, is such a rarity, and utilises a different set of aural skills. I was challenged to explore new meanings in the text and its relationship with the music.

The other particular highlight was singing in a concert that included excerpts from Handel’s *Rinaldo*. I sang the aria ‘Lascia ch’io pianga’ with the Academy Festival Orchestra in the Lobero Theatre under the baton of Maestro Nicholas McGegan, considered “one of the finest baroque

conductors of his generation” (*London Independent*). A particularly fond memory is of walking into the theatre through the artists’ entrance and reading the ‘Hall of Fame’. I felt so privileged to be performing on the same stage as opera singers such as Elizabeth Schwarzkopf and Lotte Lehmann!

Unique to the Academy is the Compeer Program — each Academy Fellows is paired with a Compeer: an individual, couple or family from among the audience members and patrons. Compeers act as friends, and we would see them once a week for meals, outings, home visits and sight-seeing. Best of all, they were our personal cheer-squad — familiar, smiling faces in the audience for our performances. I thoroughly enjoyed this aspect, and have many memories I’ll cherish forever.

MORGAN BALFOUR: HAWAII PERFORMING ARTS FESTIVAL, BIG ISLAND, HAWAII: 5 – 27 JULY 2015

Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship holder, Morgan Balfour, was fortunate to escape the winter freeze and soak up some tropical island sun in Hawaii this July. As a finalist in the 2014 Joan Sutherland & Richard Bonyngé Bel Canto Award, Morgan was the recipient of a full scholarship as a Professional Fellow at the 2015 Hawaiian Performing Arts Festival. This annual event offers a world-class, intensive musical training and performance program, including master classes, concerts, recitals and staged productions.

“I was offered the role of Pamina in Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, one of the three productions to be staged in the Festival. Mozart is my favourite composer, and it’s one of my dreams to sing all Mozart’s heroines.”

It turned out that there were another couple of Aussies in town, making the experience even more memorable for Morgan, as Melba Opera Trust supporters Roz Zalewski (also a Melba



Jeremy Ruskin QC & Morgan Balfour

Board member) and her husband Jeremy Ruskin QC were in the audience of *The Magic Flute*.

“It was so lovely to know that they were out in the audience supporting me. It meant a great deal to me to have them there — I really appreciated it.”

The feeling on this happy crossing of paths was mutual, with Jeremy sharing, “As a *Magic Flute* groupie, it was a thrill to see this version performed on the Big Island. Morgan Balfour’s performance as Pamina was superb: both the power and sweetness of her *bel canto* voice and her polished acting. How lucky was Tamino to get a Pamina as gorgeous as this!”

SHAUNTAI BATZKE: CANTO DE LAS AMERICAS: A WORKSHOP FOR ASPIRING ARTISTS IN THE VOCAL ARTS, BELLE ARTI CENTER FOR THE ARTS, FOREST HILLS, NEW YORK, 20 – 30 AUGUST 2015

Shauntai Batzke, Harold Blair and Mel & Nina Waters Scholarship recipient, had two dreams come true when she successfully auditioned for Belle Arti Center’s first summer workshop, an intensive program for aspiring singers; her first trip across the seas and landing in that concrete jungle where dreams are made of...New York. Each artist works one-on-one with mentors

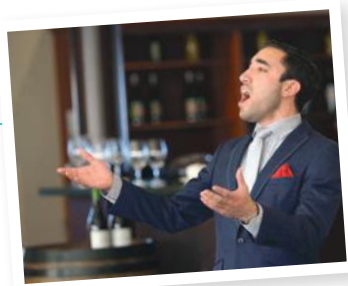
from internationally-acclaimed opera houses such as The Metropolitan Opera to refine vocal technique, musical style, diction and the art of performing. The workshop culminates in a showcase performance.

“It’s been a dream for a long time to combine travel with singing, and I’ve wanted to visit New York all my life, so it was amazing to be there! Alongside my study, a visit to The Metropolitan Opera was on top of my list; particularly as it’s a goal of mine to sing the role of Liù in Puccini’s *Turandot* there one day.

As an all-intensive program, it was important that Shauntai was well-prepared and focused for this opportunity, especially in a city that offers so much temptation for distraction. She credits her time as a Melba scholar in ensuring her readiness. “My Melba Opera Trust training has helped build my confidence in preparing for international experiences. Through the Mentor Program, I feel I’ve developed greatly in many areas of performance and business management. I know this experience will provide me with a greater sense of what I want to achieve in my career, both in Australia and overseas.”



Shauntai Batzke, fourth from left, with fellow participants of the Canto de las Americas summer programme in front of The Met



BRENTON SPITERI & THE OPÉRA DE LYON, FRANCE

ALUMNUS, TENOR BRENTON SPITERI, SHARES SOME NEWS ABOUT HIS TRIP TO FRANCE FOR A MAIN-STAGE ROLE AT THE OPÉRA DE LYON, AND AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A BRIEF RETURN HOME TO AUSTRALIA.

I am currently preparing to take up a place in the studio at Opéra de Lyon, which has been in existence since 1831. This exciting and unique residency will allow me to develop and extend my solo repertoire with the many coaches and artists of the house, and to perform a role on the main stage this December – January in Offenbach's *Le Roi Carotte*, a satirical operetta written in 1872 about corruption in leadership. It was

last performed in 1877, so with such a large gap between performances, it will require a complete re-imagining in order to accommodate the many cultural and political changes that have occurred since then. By the way, it tells the story of a large carrot who usurps the throne, and the score literally calls for a chorus of carrots, beetroots, turnips and radishes!

I have been working towards an opportunity like this for a long time,

and I am excited to be able to sing a role with a large company overseas. Part of the challenge of an experience like this is that you don't really know what to expect when you first arrive. I am preparing a lot of music to work on in my coaching sessions, and learning my role in the opera as thoroughly as possible.

Sydney Chamber Opera's *Fly Away Peter* has been announced as part of the line-up for this year's

Melbourne Festival and fortunately, my commitments in Lyon will allow me to come back briefly and reprise my role of Ashley in this amazing work. I loved performing it in Sydney earlier this year, but it's even better to know that I'll get to perform it in Melbourne for the friends and family who missed it the first time around.

BETROTHAL AND BETRAYAL

CONQUERING ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, UK

THEATRE AND OPERA DIRECTOR SUZANNE CHAUNDY IS ALSO KNOWN THROUGH PROJECTS SHE HAS WORKED ON FOR MELBA OPERA TRUST. IN LONDON RECENTLY, SHE TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND THE JETTE PARKER YOUNG ARTISTS PROGRAMME ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ON 17 JULY, FEATURING MELBA ALUMNI.



Lauren Fagan as Leïla
© Clive Barda

London turned on a dazzling summer's day on the 17th of July this year for the Jette Parker Young Artists Programme Annual Performance at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. I arrived early, in time to watch the buzzing crowd build in the sparkling Paul Hamlyn Champagne Bar. For this matinee performance, it was wonderful to see an audience made up of opera lovers, supporters, agents, friends, families, industry professionals and people of all ages: they were out in force to see these bright young stars of the future.

As I walked up the stairs to the bar, past the bust of Dame Nellie Melba, I wondered what she would think of this day, with four young Australians, under the direction of a fifth, appearing on the stage she knew and loved so well. I am certain she would have been very pleased indeed that three of those artists had been recipients of Melba Opera Trust scholarships: soprano Lauren Fagan, tenor Samuel Sakker and baritone Samuel Dale Johnson.

The performance, entitled 'Betrothal and Betrayal', was a diverse program linked by the titular theme, provided an opportunity to showcase the talents of the young singers, director and conductors on the main stage of one of the world's greatest opera theatres. The young artists spend two years at the House as full-time salaried company members, and receive coaching in all opera disciplines, including music, language, movement, acting and stage technique, as well as regularly working on stage in small roles or as covers (understudies) in main stage productions. Samuel Dale Johnson had just concluded a season of a controversial production of *Guillaume Tell* by Rossini, in which he played the herdsman Leuthold. He had also recently played the Baron Douphol in a long season of Verdi's *La traviata*, along with Samuel Sakker, who played Gastone de Letorieres and covered the role of Alfredo Germont. Lauren

was covering Musetta in Puccini's *La bohème* and Jemmy in *Guillaume Tell*.

Australian Director Greg Eldridge, also a member of the Programme, staged the event on a minimal budget (by Royal Opera House standards). Within the wood-paneled walls of the set of Verdi's *Falstaff*, then playing at the Opera House, he created five distinct worlds to present scenes from Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*, Cilea's *Adriana Lecouvreur*, Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs de perles*, Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust* and Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*.

The curtain then rose on Armenian soprano Anush Hovhannisyan, singing Amelia's aria 'Come in quest'ora bruna' from *Simon Boccanegra*. She was joined by Samuel Sakker, who played her lover Gabriele in the ensuing excerpt. Sakker impressed with his power and control. It was an outstanding achievement to sing this difficult repertoire with such impressive technique, warmth and flair. After a quick change, he had the opportunity to show off his versatility and acting ability in the role of the seedy and sleazy Abbé de Chazeuil in a scene from *Adriana Lecouvreur*. Also showcased here was Lauren Fagan and Irish mezzo soprano Rachel Kelly, who had enormous fun playing the flighty and feisty actresses.

After interval there was a distinct change of mood with a move to focus on French repertoire for the second half. It began with an excerpt from Act III of *Les Pêcheurs de perles*, featuring Lauren as the priestess Leïla, and Samuel Dale Johnson playing Zurga, chief of the fishermen. The curtain opened on Johnson giving a fine rendition of 'L'orage est calmé'. The dramatic sparks really flew when Lauren entered to beg for Nadir's life, as Zurga's jealousy overcame him. Both artists were extremely impressive in this scene, causing extended applause from the near-capacity house.

The artists took extended curtain calls,

and this audience member could not help but feel some real 'Aussie pride' at the achievements of each and every one of these remarkable young artists. It is so exciting to know that another member of the Melba family, mezzo-soprano Emily Edmonds, will join the Jette Parker Programme in September. So Melba's legacy will continue to live on within the walls of The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

Melba Opera Trust supporters, Graham and Lorraine Schmidt, were also present at the Jette Parker Young Artists Programme Annual Performance. They enjoyed it so much they were inspired to write this letter to Acting General Manager, Olivia Giglia:

Dear Ms Giglia

What a performance!

First, we noted that Australian-born Greg Eldridge was the Director, and his sets were simple but very effective.

For us, the absolute highlight was the excerpt from Act III of Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs de perles*, sung by Lauren Fagan and Samuel Dale Johnson, with Michele Gamba conducting. In a word: sublime! We were mesmerised by the singing, and the acclamation showed that the rest of the audience agreed with our judgment.

All the artists were unknown to us, so what a pleasant surprise that our two favourites were alumni of Melba Opera Trust! We are lay people in the music world, but are sure these two will have long and favourable futures in opera.

It was wonderful to be in such a historic theatre hearing top-class up-and-coming young artists at the start of their careers.

Please pass on our congratulations of the very good work performed by all at Melba Opera Trust.

Yours sincerely,
Graham and Lorraine Schmidt



Samuel Dale Johnson as Zurga, Lauren Fagan as Leïla © Clive Barda



James Platt as Fiesco and Samuel Sakker as Gabriele © Clive Barda



MELBA ALUMNI TAKE

CENTRE STAGE

AS WONDERFUL AS IT IS TO SEE MELBA OPERA TRUST ALUMNI SUCCEEDING OVERSEAS, IT IS EQUALLY GRATIFYING TO SEE THAT TWO OF OUR ALUMNI HAVE ACHIEVED PRINCIPAL ROLES ON THE MAIN STAGE IN OPERA AUSTRALIA’S 2016 SYDNEY SEASON.

Soprano Stacey Alleaume has previously been a principal artist for Opera Australia Schools and Regional Tours. At the Sydney Opera House in 2016, she will sing Leïla in Bizet’s *The Pearlfishers* in February/March, and Micaëla in Bizet’s *Carmen* in July/August. She will also play Alexandra Mason in a new production of *The Eighth Wonder* by Alan John with a libretto by Dennis Watkins, which tells the story of the sometimes troubled process of building the Sydney Opera House. It will be staged on the Opera House’s steps, so that the building itself becomes a stage.

And Hannah Dahlenburg (soprano), a Melba scholar from 2011–2012, will sing the Queen of the Night in Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* from late December 2015 to mid January 2016, a role she has previously played for Opera Australia On Tour.

Opera Australia’s CEO, Craig Hassall, is delighted to see our alumni “go from strength to strength through the company. I look at Melba Opera Trust alumni out in the real world, and they

have an aptitude, a willingness and a ‘can do’ attitude to this business. This is very refreshing and much appreciated, and will stand them in good stead for the future.”

Having conducted an ‘industry talk’ as part of our Mentor Program in 2014, Craig is looking forward to doing so again in the future. “I was very impressed with the students I spoke to last year. I told them I would talk about the business side of opera, and how we make it work financially and operationally. It’s good to understand the practicalities of how we hire people, how we put together a season, and even how we work out performance numbers. Then I suggested they should ask me questions, and I was surprised at how informed and holistic their queries were. For example, they asked about the industry as a whole and about its health: they just seemed to be incredibly mature for their age, and for this stage of their careers. And I thought to myself that it must be something to do with the Trust’s program.”

Stacey Alleaume for Opera Australia. Image courtesy of Opera Australia.

AN EXPERT LINE-UP

2016 SCHOLARSHIP AUDITION PANEL

SEEKING THE NEXT MELBA IS NO MEAN FEAT AND REQUIRES THE HIGHEST CALIBRE OF INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS TO RECOGNISE SUPERIOR POTENTIAL FROM A NATIONAL POOL OF APPLICANTS, ALL EAGER TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP IN THEIR VOCAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STUDIES.

Applications for our 2016 scholarships closed on 30 September.

Here we introduce the esteemed artists tasked with identifying the most promising young opera stars of tomorrow.



Sharolyn Kimmorley AM

We are proud that Sharolyn is once again at the helm of this year’s application process and Chair of the audition panel. During Stage One Sharolyn carefully assesses biographies, written applications and digital performances to determine those invited to Stage Two — live auditions in Melbourne, to be held in November. Sharolyn is known to our Melba community as not only our Artistic Advisor, but as one of Australia’s finest vocal coaches and accompanists, in high demand in Australia and overseas.



Peter Coleman-Wright AO

Widely considered one of the most versatile singers in the world today, we’re delighted for Peter to join us for Stage One and Stage Two of the audition process. Peter’s distinguished service to the performing arts as an operatic baritone and as a mentor and role model for young singers saw him awarded the Order of Australia Medal in the 2015 Queen’s Birthday Honours.

Peter’s career has taken him to the great opera houses and concert halls of the world, most notably with Royal Opera Covent Garden, the Met in New York, ENO, and Paris collaborating with world-class conductors and directors.

He has performed all over Europe most notably at La Scala Milan, La Fenice Venice, Munich, Netherlands, Paris Bastille and Garnier, Bordeaux, Geneva and Teatro Colon Buenos Aires, as well as the festivals of Bregenz and Aix-en-Provence.



Johannes Fritzsich

Johannes is a German born, Australian-based conductor whose reputable international career has spanned two and a half decades. He will participate in Stage Two of our audition process.

Both within Germany and internationally, Johannes has conducted many great orchestras. These include Hamburger Sinfoniker, Düsseldorfer Sinfoniker, the Swedish Radio Orchestra, the Norwegian Radio Orchestra, the Orchestre Philharmonique Strassbourg, the Orchestre National de Montpellier, the Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, the Auckland Philharmonic Orchestra and in Australia the Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Tasmania, Queensland and Western Australia Symphony orchestras as well as Orchestra Victoria.

Johannes has worked with opera companies both nationally and internationally.

In November 2014 Johannes was appointed Conductor Laureate of the Queensland Symphony Orchestra after his seven years tenure as their Chief Conductor. In December he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Music from the University of Queensland.



THE MAGIC BEHIND MELBA ARTISTS

THE MELBA ARTISTS PROGRAM REMAINS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE MELBA OPERA TRUST'S PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES.

Associate Repetiteur Stefan Cassomenos, scholar Nicholas Tolputt, alumna Alexandra Flood and scholar Jeremy Kleeman at Melbourne Recital Centre

Many of you will already be aware how Melba Artists provides essential performance experiences for our current scholars and alumni to put their individual work and Mentor Program learning into practice, enabling them to communicate their art ever more comfortably and compellingly in front of a variety of audiences.

The magic of a successful Melba Artists engagement is created by a phenomenal team. Highly respected and sought-after violinist, Jo Beaumont is the Melba Artists Manager. She sources and negotiates a variety of optimal performance opportunities through her impressive and extensive network within the world of music in Australia and abroad. She is ably assisted by Melba Opera Trust Program Coordinator Bruce Raggatt, who attends to the logistical aspects of the program. Completing the invaluable performance opportunity is the Trust's Artistic Advisor, Sharolyn Kimmorley AM, who creates the musical programs to suit each Melba Artist engagement. Therefore, when making a booking, Melba Artist clients receive the benefit of two Australian musical luminaries and the best new talent in the country, while enjoying tailored entertainment

for their event and knowing they are contributing the strength of Australia's operatic future.

In 2015, the Melba Artists Program continues apace. Particularly exciting was a series of two recitals presented in conjunction with Melbourne Recital Centre (MRC) in the venue's state of the art Salon. The first, *Baroque to Broadway* was held in July, with current scholars soprano Nikki Hill, mezzo-soprano Jade Moffat and bass-baritone Daniel Carison, who were joined by alumnus tenor Brenton Spiteri, and Melba Opera Trust Associate Repetiteur Stefan Cassomenos.

One of the many important attributes of a professional musician is to be ready for a rehearsal process that may be quite short. A key consideration here is the various locations across Australia from which the scholars and alumni reside as well as their full and, at times, demanding schedules, making the opportunity to rehearse together rare.

"As artists, we're all juggling busy schedules, so the *Baroque to Broadway* rehearsal schedule had to be similar to that of a professional

rehearsal process", shared Daniel. "We put it together in two rehearsals, including the dress rehearsal. Professionals need to be well prepared before rehearsing with others, and I believe the success of this concert was achieved through the level of dedicated preparation by each of the artists."

Another mark of a true professional is the ability to perform in a range of styles, and Melba Artists performances are designed with this in mind. Daniel remarked on the value of this approach. "Like most Melba concerts, the repertoire for *Baroque to Broadway* varied in terms of period, style, language and theme. One of the benefits of the Melba Artists program is that you are challenged as an artist to become well versed in a variety of styles. In an industry that is becoming increasingly competitive, one must be versatile. I feel the Melba Artists concerts have assisted me to become a well-rounded artist."

The second MRC instalment entitled '*To Music*', was accompanied by Stefan Cassomenos, and performed by current scholars bass-baritone Jeremy Kleeman and counter-tenor Nicholas Tolputt. Joining them was alumna Alexandra

Flood, warmly welcomed back in Australia by Melba Opera Trust during a summer break from her studies at the Munich Hochschule für Musik und Theater.

"'*To Music*' was really special, as it was my only public appearance in Melbourne this year. And it was an honour to perform at the prestigious MRC, so I put a lot of work into it. It's wonderful that, while cracking the industry in Europe, I can maintain my roots and contribute to the music community in Melbourne, where I cut my teeth. And I was thrilled to collaborate with Jeremy Kleeman, whom I've known for years, and to have the opportunity to sing with young Melba scholar Nicholas Tolputt. I had never sung with a countertenor before, so that was really exciting; he has a lovely voice that brings out different tones in my own.'

Offering another diverse program including works by Purcell, Richard Strauss, Monteverdi, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Gluck, Verdi, Britten and, of course, Schubert's 'An die Musik', the concert was highly regarded by patrons who, with thanks to our generous event partners, De Bortoli, enjoyed a glass from their La Boheme

range while sharing the highlights in the foyer.

The Opera Society's *Christmas in July* luncheon, also in July, at Pullman on the Park was another important Melba Artists engagement. As readers will be aware, one of Melba Opera Trust's scholarships is the Opera Society Vocal Scholarship, currently held by Daniel Carison. However on this occasion, it was alumna soprano Janet Todd who entertained with a program including Bellini, Debussy, Mozart, Massenet and Puccini, accompanied by Stefan Cassomenos. The Opera Society's Valma Allaway was delighted to welcome her back. "One of the Society's aims is to encourage young singers through scholarships and performance, and we remain passionate in our support of young artists. For those members who had previously heard Janet sing, it was a privilege to note her progress in artistry and performance. This, along with her delightful personality, meant that all present were enthusiastic in their appreciation and applause. The event was a treat: good food, good company and beautiful music!"

For Janet, it was a pleasure to perform for the Opera Society. "It was lovely to escape the wind and rain outside and sing in front of familiar faces in this mid-winter celebration. Everyone was in good spirits, and the cozy atmosphere in the room was matched by the warmth with which they welcomed me as an alumna of Melba Opera Trust. It was a particular delight to see Valma Allaway again, as she has shown so much support over the years."

These concerts are just some of many that have featured on the 2015 calendar so far. Others included a return engagement at Mandeville Hall, Toorak — *Opera in the Mansion* — to a sell-out audience as well as a reprise of *Nellie in Her Own Write* at the Port Fairy Spring Music Festival.

To learn about opportunities to attend Melba Artists' public performances, or to book singers for your own event, readers are encouraged to visit our website melbaoperatrust.com.au.

 DE BORTOLI WINES

 OPERA SOCIETY

THANK YOU

MELBA OPERA TRUST IS GRATEFUL TO LADY SOUTHEY AC FOR INVITING THE MENTOR PROGRAM INTO THE MYER FAMILY'S 'CRANLANA' MANSION ON THREE OCCASIONS THIS YEAR.

Master classes with Italian soprano Daria Masiero and celebrated Australian soprano, Yvonne Kenny AM took place in the surrounds of the culturally, socially and architecturally noteworthy 'Cranlana'. Our young scholars felt especially fortunate to work in the beautiful ball room, with its homely warmth. An upcoming master class with internationally

celebrated tenor Simon O'Neill from New Zealand, together with end of year celebrations, will round out extraordinary learning experiences for the 2015 scholars at this venue.

Melba Opera Trust is honoured by the support and encouragement of Lady Southey AC and the Myer family.

Nikki Hill in master class with Yvonne Kenny AM



CRANLANA

MINDING MELBA'S MEMORIAL

ADDIO, SENZA RANCOR

DID YOU KNOW THAT MELBA OPERA TRUST IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF DAME NELLIE MELBA'S MEMORIAL?

Indeed how this came to be is quite an intricate story. "Melba left money to the Melba Conservatorium on condition that they maintained her grave at Mount Mary, a property she owned near Healesville. However, she changed her mind, deciding she wanted to be buried in Lilydale next to her father, David Mitchell", informs Sue Thompson, President of the Lilydale & District Historical Society. "Unfortunately, she omitted to change her will. Naturally the Melba Conservatorium wanted to fulfil her wishes, but were not able to do so, because she was not buried at Mount Mary. Everyone was trying to do the right thing, but were hampered by this issue with Melba's will. So the Conservatorium and Melba's Family joined forces to get the Supreme Court of Victoria to overthrow that section of her will, and were successful."

Successive generations of Melba's descendants have maintained patronage of the Melba Conservatorium and now Melba Opera Trust, and it is the Trust's honour to ensure Melba's grave is well maintained forevermore. According to Sue, "people still come from all over the world to visit Melba's grave", to say nothing of the local visitors, so this is an important task.

So who is the 'chosen one', tasked with the responsibility of seeing that the weeds are kept at bay, and the flowers not overgrown?

"I've been maintaining the grave since November last year", says John Brown, Yarra Valley Landscape Architect, and, in his own words, 'grave keeper to the diva'. "I keep the *buxus sempervirens* box hedge clipped, and weed and rake the area of rough, white stone around it. I also prune the roses in front of it, and clean it down. It's a beautiful grave to look after".

But John's interest does not end there. In his capacity as Vice-President of the Lilydale & District Historical Society, he is researching the history and building a file on Melba's grave. "I've learned that renowned British architect Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) designed the headstone and its surroundings. Apparently Lutyens lived next door to Melba in Cavendish Square in London, and her son George Armstrong asked him to design his mother's memorial. Lutyens was also a landscape architect, and worked with well-known British horticulturist and garden designer Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932), who created many gardens in the UK, Europe and the USA. Among other things, Lutyens was commissioned to design the cenotaph in London to commemorate the contribution of British and Commonwealth servicemen and women who died in the two world wars and later conflicts. It's where the Queen lays a wreath on Remembrance Day. I think Melba's grave was partially modelled on this, because pictures of the cenotaph

reveal a wreath on either side of it, similar to the one that runs around the top of Melba's headstone."

As those who have made a pilgrimage to visit Melba's grave will know, the words 'Addio, senza rancor' (goodbye, without regrets) are engraved at its base. Taken from the aria 'Donde lieta uscì', sung by Mimi in Puccini's *La bohème*, one of Melba's favourite roles.

But Melba is not the only one to have memorialised this opera in the Yarra Valley, where the legacy of another fine, local family lives on. De Bortoli Wines continue to name a range of wines after the opera, and indeed another after Melba herself. Manager Leanne De Bortoli explains.

"Naturally there's a big connection between Melba and the Yarra Valley, and we were looking to develop a range of wines that was quite different. We started with the largely Cabernet-based Melba range years ago, and it did really well. People asked us when we were going to add a white wine to complement the red, so that's why we developed the La Bohème range, which are aromatic and beautiful, like Melba's voice!"

Many readers will have had the opportunity to sample the range at Melba Opera Trust functions, as De Bortoli continues in its generous sponsorship and support of the Trust and its activities such as our recent Melbourne Recital Centre event. For Leanne, there are obvious parallels



HER SPIRIT RETURNS TO HER MAJESTY'S

THIS YEAR, HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE IN BALLARAT TURNED 140 YEARS YOUNG. THE GREATEST SIGNIFICANCE TO READERS OF THE MELBA IS THAT DAME NELLIE MELBA PERFORMED IN THIS HISTORICAL THEATRE NUMEROUS TIMES IN HER CAREER.

In a case of her spirit returning, scholar Zoe Drummond was invited to perform at the 140th anniversary celebrations and performed favourites from Melba's career. Zoe shared her impressions of this auspicious occasion with us.

"I started feeling particularly amazed by the circumstances of being invited to perform when *I Am Melba* biographer Ann Blainey and I were in conversation about the repertoire Melba presented while in Ballarat. We discovered she performed twice — in 1885 and 1927.



Zoe Drummond

Her performances in this theatre featured a commissioned art song by Landon Ronald — however her encore at both shows was 'Comin Through the Rye' — a traditional Scottish tune.

To make matters even more neatly suited, my pianist, Gwen Kennelly, had a thick Scottish accent, and helped me, somewhat, translate and deliver the dialect of the piece, choosing the exact verses and ornaments Melba had sung.

It was almost haunting to sing the same repertoire on the same stage. I felt very connected to Dame Nellie Melba, and particularly thankful for the overwhelming influence she has made on my year. It led me to think of her more as an incredibly generous and insightful woman, rather than purely a singing legend.

The whole concert was wonderful — a real variety show of talent. My personal favourite was a silent film being projected on to the back of the stage, and a charismatic organist providing all the sound effects.

It was also lovely to perform in my family's home town, with my beautiful family in the audience."

Image courtesy of the Lilydale & District Memorial Society



Shauntai Batzke

BLAIR SCHOLAR SINGS AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE

ALMOST THREE YEARS AGO MELBA OPERA TRUST LAUNCHED THE HAROLD BLAIR OPERA SCHOLARSHIP AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE. HOSTED BY OUR THEN PATRONS-IN-CHIEF, THE GOVERNOR, THE HONORABLE ALEX CHERNOV AO QC, AND MRS ELIZABETH CHERNOV, THE RECEPTION INCLUDED A PERFORMANCE BY THE INAUGURAL RECIPIENT OF THE SCHOLARSHIP, TIRIKI ONUS.

Following in the footsteps of her predecessor, Shauntai Batzke — current Harold Blair Opera Scholarship recipient — was honoured to sing at the inauguration of the 29th Governor of Victoria, the Honourable Linda Dessau AM, in July.

“Being invited to sing at Government house was exciting enough, but being asked to sing for the inauguration of Victoria’s new Governor and the first ever female Governor of Victoria was really an honour! I sang ‘O mio babbino caro’ from Puccini’s *Gianni Schicchi*, which is the Governor’s favourite aria, and one of mine as well. I sang it with heart, and with great appreciation for the opportunity. Many people shared how much they enjoyed it, as I did myself. It is certainly my most significant performance engagement yet, and one I will remember with great delight.”

Seed funding from the John and Gwenda Lloyd Trust made the establishment of the Harold Blair Opera Scholarship possible. Having supported Blair’s career, the Lloyds approached Indigenous singer, composer and educator, Deborah Cheetham, about

how their support should continue. How fortunate Deborah recommended the funds be transferred to Melba Opera Trust to create, in perpetuity, a scholarship in Blair’s name.

In memory of John and Gwenda Lloyd’s vision to support talented Indigenous Australian singers, Melba Opera Trust is working with current supporters, including individual donors, the Fairley Foundation and descendants of the Lloyd family to endow the Harold Blair Opera Scholarship so that it may be offered in perpetuity. Your contribution towards the endowment goal of \$500,000 can help realise this vision.

Tax-deductible donations to the Harold Blair Opera Scholarship can be made via:

PHONE 03 9867 4833

EMAIL info@melbaoperatrust.com.au

VISIT melbaoperatrust.com.au

MELBAS & MENTORS ENJOY MANTRA

OUR ASPIRING SCHOLARS ARE DEDICATED TO DEVELOPING THEIR CAREERS, SOME TRAVELLING FROM INTERSTATE FOR THEIR NEXT ROUND OF MELBA POLISH.

So a rejuvenating night’s sleep is essential to ensure they are prepared for long days of rehearsals, individual practice and mentor sessions. Indeed our mentors also travel from interstate and overseas to impart their wisdom. Mantra St Kilda Road General Manager, Aaron Bond, recognises that their luxury apartment complex is ideally positioned to support the thriving arts and sports culture of Melbourne. This is why he continues to be proud of

the support that Mantra St Kilda Road provides our scholars and mentors for a home away from home when they visit Melbourne for our Mentor Program. Aaron always takes an enthusiastic interest in the development of our scholars. While on her last visit to Melbourne, Jade enjoyed a coffee with Aaron and updated him on the news of her relocation to Guildhall School of Music to take up a full

scholarship. Melba Opera Trust warmly thanks Mantra St Kilda Road for their continuing support. To enjoy Mantra’s hospitality first hand, access our exclusive ‘Melba supporter’ rate when booking your accommodation. Simply enter ‘Melba’ as the promotion code, call them on (03) 9525 0400 or email stkilda.res@mantra.com.au.



LETTERS FROM ABROAD



PANAYIOTA KALATZIS HELD THE MELBA OPERA TRUST’S RUSKIN OPERA AWARD AND THE MEL & NINA WATERS AWARD IN 2013.

24 August 2015

Hello Melba family and friends,

I am writing from my small village in Greece, where I’m spending quality time with relatives, and soaking up the sun while learning repertoire before heading home to Australia in just under a week.

It’s true the saying, ‘time flies when you’re having fun’. My year abroad has been such an amazing experience.

In July I graduated with an MA in Advanced Vocal Studies from the Wales International Academy of Voice (WIAV) under the tutelage of renowned tenor Dennis O’Neill. My time was mainly spent in Cardiff, but I regularly had access to opportunities in and around London.

Like Melba Opera Trust, the Academy provides its students with coaches, conductors and mentors of the highest calibre. Our routine schedule included one singing lesson a week with Dennis O’Neill, during which we would focus on either technique or repertoire. Every week, we would also have one lesson

with each of the principal faculty members. Each offered their own expertise in a different performance element, and this helped a lot in developing a wide range of skills. One-on-one language coaching was also available weekly to whoever wanted to work on repertoire for assessment, auditions or competitions.

On top of our usual schedule, most weeks would include a two-day master class, when we all came together in an intimate setting to hear each other and interact. This allowed us to work and connect with these wonderful mentors, as well as observe one another, and to get to know how this industry works and what it takes to succeed. We were able to work with great artists who have appeared on significant world stages: Richard Bonyngne, Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, Susan Bullock, Della Jones, David Gowland, Tina Ruta and Ryland Davies.

The Academy doesn’t have an opera performance component; instead it provides many performance opportunities through its assessment

schedule. These assessments and performance opportunities focused on finessing technique, opera and role development, art song, aria recitals and mock auditions.

I was fortunate to receive an opportunity through the mock audition process. On the panel that day was Dennis O’Neill, alongside the Welsh National Opera’s (WNO) casting director, Isabel Murphy. I was thrilled to receive a phone call from Isabel the following day offering me a general audition for the WNO! So now I wait in the hope that I impressed them enough to get the opportunity to return to sing for the company one day...I will keep you posted!

Other performances included a showcase for WIAV students, in which we sang for London agents and opera houses, and a concert featuring WIAV students that coincided with the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition. One of the perks of being a WIAV student was that we had access to observe WNO dress rehearsals, and as it happened to be the year of the BBC’s Cardiff Singer of the World competition, we had the chance to attend all the competition events.

Not only did I have many singing opportunities at the Academy, but I was also fortunate to sing in

London and Europe. With thanks to the Australian International Opera Award and the Tait Memorial Trust, I gained more performance experience. Events included a champagne reception at Australia House and an invitation to perform at the Australia & New Zealand Festival of Literature & Arts. I was also guest soloist at an Easter Sunday mass in a church in the town of Correns in Provence, France.

All that you could imagine you would need as an aspiring opera singer is at your finger tips in the UK: great mentors, conductors, teachers and opera houses. And I was surprised to see how easy it was to encounter famous people. I saw master classes with Joyce DiDonato, Anna Netrebko and Joseph Calleja at Covent Garden, and I spotted Bryn Terfel leaving a performance of *Sweeney Todd*!

My year as a Melba Opera Trust scholar certainly prepared me to make the most of my opportunities overseas, so it was particularly special to run into some familiar faces from home, including Melba alumni and Covent Garden Jette Parker Young Artists Lauren Fagan, Samuel Dale Johnson, Samuel Sakker and Emily Edmonds. I saw them individually for a quick catch-up over a drink, and I was fortunate enough to sing

alongside Emily Edmonds in the Tait Memorial Trust event, ‘Shakespeare in the Salon’, earlier in the year.

So I really have a taste of what it was like to travel and sing abroad. What’s next for me? I hope to return to the UK and Europe in the near future; however, in the meantime, I am preparing for concerts and competitions I have coming up in Sydney and New Zealand. In November and December, I will be participating in the Lisa Gasteen National Opera School for the fourth time.

Opera remains my passion, and I feel so fortunate to be doing what I love. I’m really looking forward to continuing on to bigger and better things.

Love, Panayiota



Panayiota Kalatzis with Dame Kiri Te Kanawa

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