

# THE MELBA

MAGAZINE OF MELBA OPERA TRUST

Edition 20 Winter 2019

MORE THAN A VOICE  
PREPARING: THE KEY TO SUCCESS  
COAST TO COAST IN THE USA

*Melba*

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Cleo Lee-McGowan and Stephen Marsh  
performing at Meet the Scholars 2018,  
Deakin Edge, Federation Square.  
Photography: David Ng

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It is with great pleasure that  
I introduce our 2019 Winter  
magazine.

Within its pages there are updates  
from our remarkable alumni who  
continue to go from strength to  
strength in all corners of the world.  
We also take a moment to celebrate  
their achievements off the stage.  
So much of the Melba approach  
involves nurturing the personal  
and professional development of  
our scholars, which often manifest  
in areas outside the performance  
realm.

It's been a particularly busy start  
to the year with newly appointed  
Artistic Manager Sharolyn  
Kimmerley AM launching the  
program in late January, a month  
earlier than in previous years.  
Traditionally our artists are  
preparing for international auditions  
or commencing studies abroad  
by September/October and so by  
commencing in January we can  
maximise their preparation within  
the Melba program.

Already, artists have undertaken four  
intensive Mentor Blocks with another



three scheduled in the coming  
months. As ever, the program offers  
a breadth of training that addresses  
key aspects of business, language,  
industry networks and artistic  
development. You will read that we  
have been fortunate to have re-  
engaged several of our world-class  
mentors and, later in the year, we  
are looking forward to welcoming  
renowned vocal coach Linnhe  
Robertson and conductor Asher  
Fisch for the first time.

Another focus has been the  
redevelopment of our Performance  
Program. Following a recent review,  
we have adopted a new approach,  
which you can read about in more  
detail on Page 4.

In other news, I'm pleased to report  
that our search for a new Melba  
home has been successful and  
from June you will be able to visit  
us in the heart of Melbourne's arts  
precinct at 77 Southbank Boulevard.  
We're looking forward to sharing  
our new space with our friends at  
Orchestra Victoria, Musica Viva and  
Short Black Opera.

I also take a moment to  
acknowledge my colleague Peter  
Garnick who, after nine years of  
exceptional commitment and  
leadership, will be finishing with us  
at the end of May. Over his tenure  
as Managing Director and, more  
recently, Director of Fundraising &  
Finance, Peter helped pave the way  
for this remarkable program and the  
organisation that underpins it. Peter  
joined Melba when our intention was  
more of a promise. Now, the legacy  
he leaves speaks to the enormous  
contribution that he has made after

nearly a decade of service. We  
remain grateful and wish him every  
success in his next appointment  
with Victorian Opera. At Melba Opera  
Trust, we are fond of saying 'once a  
Melba, always a Melba', and I have  
no doubt readers can look forward  
to Peter's continuing involvement as  
one of our strongest ambassadors.

In September we will be sharing our  
special ten-year anniversary edition  
of *The Melba* magazine, which will  
capture the journey of this dynamic  
organisation over the last decade.  
While we are taking a moment to  
reflect and celebrate this milestone,  
our eyes remain fixed on the future  
and we are working on several  
exciting projects to ensure we  
continue to provide the best support  
to Australia's most promising young  
opera singers and répétiteurs.

In the meantime, I would like to  
sincerely thank you, our community,  
for your continued involvement. We  
rely entirely on private philanthropic  
support and remain enormously  
grateful for the generosity of our  
donors who make it all possible.

Please enjoy the 20<sup>th</sup> edition of  
*The Melba*.

## Singer of the world

**Soprano Lauren Fagan  
sees it as the most famous  
competition for launching  
the careers of young singers:  
it is the BBC Cardiff Singer  
of the World competition  
and Lauren, a Melba Opera  
Trust alumna and a rising  
international star, is the only  
Australian among twenty  
finalists for 2019.**

Lauren says she has so far  
submitted her aria and song  
programs. "And very importantly  
I have found the gowns I will  
wear," she says. "The beauty of  
this competition is we all have the  
chance not only to sing in the aria  
section (with orchestra) but there is  
also a song section. I am competing  
for the Song Prize with my friend,  
Welsh pianist Jâms Coleman."

Fifteen countries are represented in  
this year's competition. The Song  
Prize, which finalists may choose to  
enter, comes with a \$18,500 (AUD)  
cash prize and a concert recital at  
London's Wigmore Hall. All finalists

are eligible for the Audience Prize,  
bringing a \$4,500 (AUD) prize and a  
trophy.

"When we arrive in Cardiff in June,  
the schedule will be very intense as  
we have many media appearances,  
interviews, piano rehearsals,  
camera rehearsals, orchestral  
rehearsals," Lauren says. "I know  
these two months leading up to the  
competition are crucial and I need to  
be as prepared as possible as there  
will be little chance for that when I  
get to Cardiff. I will sing my aria heat  
on the 16th of June and song heat  
17th of June."

Nominated as best Young Singer of  
the year in 2018's International Opera  
Awards, Lauren says the Singer of the  
World competition is high pressure,  
as a huge component is the "live"  
element, given it is broadcast on  
radio and TV and streamed around  
the world. "But the good news is  
finally my friends and family back in  
Australia will be able to hear me sing  
with orchestra!" she says.

This new success follows Lauren's  
role debut as Violetta for the UK's

Opera Holland Park last year, when  
she was described by *The Guardian*  
as "one of today's finest young  
sopranos". Previously she was a  
member of the Royal Opera House's  
renowned Jette Parker Young Artists  
Programme and is a graduate of  
London's Guildhall School of Music  
and Drama. She was awarded the  
Dame Nellie Melba Scholarship  
with Melba Opera Trust in 2011  
and 2012, and recently received  
the prestigious Dame Heather Begg  
Memorial Award.

Entering the Singer of the World  
competition – which this year  
received about 500 entries – first  
involved sending judges a video  
of two arias and two songs. This  
was narrowed down to about 60  
videos. A panel including Dame Kiri  
Te Kanawa then reduced the list to  
forty, who were heard live. "I was  
lucky enough to be heard in London,  
which is where I live," Lauren says.  
The list was further whittled to  
twenty finalists.

Lauren, who recently finished her  
role as Alcina in Karlsruhe, says  
it was a wonderful experience



Lauren Fagan as Alcina for Internationale  
Händel-Festspiele, 2019.  
Photography: © Felix Grünshloß

and a role she hopes to return to.  
*Forum Opera* published a glowing  
review, saying "her laments, and in  
particular the 'Mi restano le lagrime',  
are literally gilded in gold, her voice  
can display pain incarnate, while  
also asserting powerful nobility and  
a superb helplessness".

Lauren is currently preparing for her  
first Mimi (*La bohème*) for Opera  
North. "I will then be making debuts  
at Opéra National de Bordeaux and  
Bergen National Opera and, in future  
seasons, returning to Covent Garden."

## About Melba Opera Trust

Melba Opera Trust is Australia's premier scholarship program for promising young opera singers and répétiteurs. 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 artists preparing to become professionals on the world stage.

## Inspiring Excellence – Realising Potential – Forging Careers

# Preparing: the key to success

## What does a young singer need to do to prepare for the first day of rehearsals for a forthcoming engagement?

Imagine – it's your first music call with a conductor for your first professional contract with an opera company. Are you prepared?

To help answer the question, enter renowned German-born conductor Maestro Johannes Fritzscht who recently delivered a workshop to give scholars a taste of precisely that experience and the expectations!

The session led by Maestro Fritzscht was held at the Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM) and based on an idea driven by the Melba's Artistic Manager and Scholar Advisor, Sharolyn Kimmorley AM.

Melba CEO Amy Black says the structure of this session was designed to reflect the practical nature of the Melba program, and was a strong tangible demonstration of the philosophy of the program. "We're simulating a professional environment within our training program so that when our scholars are faced with the experience in a professional environment, they will be ready and succeed," Amy says. "In a sense – preparing for success."

Maestro Fritzscht says it was organised in the manner of simulating an ensemble rehearsal day in a professional environment such as an opera company. The scholars were asked to prepare selections from Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Die Zauberflöte* and *La clemenza di Tito*, as well as Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier*.

Maestro Fritzscht says the main focus during the rehearsals was ensemble singing: using the same articulation and phrasing, paying attention to dynamics, expressions and – where necessary – blending voices. Being very particular about



Conductor Johannes Fritzscht with Cleo Lee-McGowan and Adam McMillan. Photography: David Ng



pronunciation (the excerpts were in Italian and German) was also important.

"That sounds a lot and in fact, it is a lot," Maestro Fritzscht says. "To be able to focus on so many details requires a very thorough preparation from the individual singers, a complete familiarity with their own part."

He says the Melba scholars responded very well, concentrating very hard to take everything on board and to "adjust, change, do better, listen". "I think they realised that the individual preparation can't be good enough, ever," he says. "And they realised that reading the score in every detail and to try to do what is written on each page is an

essential part of preparation before you meet with your colleagues in an ensemble call."

Sharolyn says the session was born out of her observation that many young singers had little idea about the requirements of a first day of rehearsal, often thinking that simply "getting through it" meant they were well-enough prepared.

"People increasingly use rehearsal periods to learn rather than to rehearse," Sharolyn says. "They arrive for a rehearsal period and don't really know their part well enough. I want to break that habit. It is very easy to be overwhelmed by the amount of work you have to do, so you have to plan it very thoroughly."



Sharolyn likens preparation to a good bottle of red wine – it needs to sit in the cellar for a while. Likewise, learning a big role might take years of work, letting it "be in your body" and learning every aspect of it in the way the greats of the past would sometimes spend years, rather than months, mining the music and doing deep research.

"That is what you bring to the rehearsal room. A lot of the preparation is asking 'why'. You have to know the reasons or there is no truth in your performance. I would like these singers to start their careers with a very thorough and disciplined approach to everything they learn and not be content just to get through the performance."

"I say to them, this kind of preparation will empower you, it will make you confident as a performer. If you are well prepared, you will enjoy the performance – and if they do, we the audience will enjoy the performance more."

Melba scholar Cleo Lee-McGowan says she was thrilled to be working with Maestro Fritzscht again, having done so in 2017. "In the Presentation of the Rose from *Der Rosenkavalier*, I found the experience very interesting. The duet is very difficult, with many moving parts. Xenia and I had been rehearsing the piece for quite some time and found it very challenging. But when we did it with Johannes conducting, it suddenly became absurdly more simple."

Samuel Piper also found it a delight to spend a day working with Maestro Fritzscht, having worked with him previously in two productions. "His perspective as an experienced and skilled conductor really helps us develop not only a knowledge of the repertoire we worked on with him, but also a general professional expectation for how prepared we need to be when arriving on the first day of rehearsal," Samuel says. "The objective aspects of our craft – pitch, rhythm, text, dynamics, articulation, etcetera – must all be well in place. We should also have a clear grasp on our musical choices and be able to justify our decisions based on solid evidence rather than just a hunch. This all comes after spending plenty of time with our teachers and coaches, both musical and linguistic."

"Due to my background in Kodaly musicianship, by this point I usually like to be able to focus on all the parts around me rather than on my own part. Hearing the way their rhythms and pitches influence and lock in with mine leads ultimately to a more reliable intrinsic knowledge of the piece and an ability to respond to the small changes that happen during rehearsal and live performance."

## A proud legacy at the Melba village

### When Ryman Healthcare's newest Australian retirement village had its April opening event, attended by more than 300 residents and guests, there was much talk about the woman after whom it has been named: Dame Nellie Melba.

The \$200 million Nellie Melba Retirement Village in Brandon Park is Ryman's second Australian village and it was officially opened by Dame Nellie's great-grandson, the right Hon. Lord Samuel Vestey (GCVO, GCStJ, DL), who travelled from his home in the UK for the opening.

Lord Vestey toured the village and was impressed with what he saw, informing the crowd that "I'm seriously thinking of moving in".

He described the new village as a wonderful place. It's "just the sort of thing Granny Melba would have been thrilled about" and to which she would be pleased to lend her name.

It was a grand affair, with the red carpet rolled out and a string quartet greeting the guests and residents, while hosts donning Edwardian period costumes were engaged to wait on attendees. Lord Vestey unveiled a plaque with Ryman Chief Executive Gordon MacLeod to hand over the village officially to its residents.

Music was of course a significant element of the night, with a selection of Melba-inspired musical pieces programmed, culminating in her signature piece – and exceptionally appropriate given the nature of the occasion – 'Home Sweet Home'.

As part of its commitment to honouring Dame Nellie's legacy, Ryman Healthcare has established a scholarship to support an emerging operatic star through Melba Opera Trust. Samuel Piper is the proud inaugural recipient of the Ryman Healthcare Opera Scholarship and he performed alongside this year's recipient of the Dame Nellie Melba Scholarship, Tessa Hayward, for the hallmark launch. Melba CEO Amy Black says Melba Opera Trust is looking forward to performing for residents again later in the year.

The village continues the Ryman tradition of naming villages after notable people – its first Australian retirement village, in Wheelers Hill, is named after war hero and surgeon Sir Edward "Weary" Dunlop. Ryman Healthcare, a New Zealand-based company, owns thirty-four villages and



serves more than 11,000 residents in New Zealand and Australia.

"This village will be a place of people and a place of compassion, and we're determined to create a proud legacy here," Mr MacLeod said at the opening.

Ryman Healthcare CEO Gordon MacLeod with the right Hon. Lord Samuel Vestey (GCVO, GCStJ, DL). Photography: Ryman Healthcare



# Meet the 2019 Scholars



## PEAK PERFORMANCE

**This year's Meet the Scholar concerts have benefitted from a move to integrate Melba's Performance Program more strongly with the training provided through the Mentor Program.**

When considering this new direction for the Performance Program, Melba staff asked alumni what they would have liked to have seen more of during their time with the Melba. They cited an increase in ensemble work, more robust rehearsal processes, greater access to stage directors, the inclusion of challenging and meaningful repertoire, and repeat performances to consolidate their learning on stage.

Responding to this, the Melba has instituted a new structure that CEO Amy Black says gives greater control over the type and timing of performances with which the Melba is involved.

Now performances are scheduled around the regular Mentor Blocks and Amy says this is proving far more beneficial for the scholars, as demonstrated through the calibre of the performances delivered at Meet the Scholars events in Melbourne and Sydney. The musical program was repeated three times, each in a very different setting: the Wright-Smith Arena, the more formal Hawthorn Arts Centre, and the Royal Yacht Squadron in Sydney.

"Despite being the same program, each performance was drastically different due to the venue and audience make-up. Each time the scholars were able to adapt and deliver fresh performances thanks to the detail underpinning their preparation," Amy says.

The process began with the programming. Having worked with the scholars from early in the year, Artistic Manager Sharolyn Kimmorley AM developed a program featuring repertoire

that would directly challenge and benefit each individual scholar.

Public speaking sessions were then scheduled early in the year to support the delivery of concert introductions.

Complementing this, director Brendan Hanson visited from Western Australia to deliver a workshop on managing intimacy on stage. He was also asked to stage several pieces of the Meet the Scholars concert, as was director Constantine Costi, who was engaged through the Mentor Program to deliver a stagecraft workshop.

Conductor Johannes Fritzscht led an ensemble workshop, part of which involved preparing the ensemble pieces scheduled for the Meet The Scholars concerts. Finally renowned Heldentenor Simon O'Neill, as well as delivering a vocal master class and private coaching with scholars, supervised a music rehearsal for the concerts to refine further the musical artistry.

This was the first time this new approach has been trialled by Melba and, based on the feedback received from appreciative audience members, it appears to be a formula for success. "We're looking forward to continuing to apply this new process for all of our performances this year", says Sharolyn. "Our intention is to instil best practice, rehearsal and preparation techniques so that our scholars learn to apply these standards to every performance."

— Samuel Piper in master class with Simon O'Neill, 2019.  
Photography: Andrea Russell



### Georgina Hall

**Harold Blair Opera Scholarship  
Ruskin Opera Scholarship**

Now in her second Melba year, Georgina says many areas of her work have improved, in particular her approach to language preparation. "Before Melba, I think I was a little naive in my understanding of how much work needs to go into text preparation," she says. "Realising the precision needed has brought me such clarity. It's more than just getting the sounds right – it is using the nuances of the language to bring the text, music and character to life."

Georgina has especially enjoyed the ensemble music preparation sessions with Sharolyn Kimmorley AM and Johannes Fritzscht, which led to the opportunity to stage these ensembles with directors Constantine Costi and Brendan Hanson. "Singers so often learn and stage arias for concerts and competitions, but an aria is only a tiny fraction of a role," she says. "The ensemble pieces we've been assigned are from roles that we are well-suited to and likely to perform one day. It's invaluable to have the opportunity to prepare these excerpts with such revered instructors and to walk away that much closer to having a complete and soundly prepared role."

Georgina says one of the things she loves about singing is the dedicated focus. "I love the satisfaction that comes from meeting and overcoming a challenge. Being in the studio or rehearsal room brings me such joy. Whether it's making progress with vocal technique, or finding something in the music that you've never noticed before, it's just so exciting being in that room."

Her recent achievements include her international debut in Amsterdam during February last year singing in *The Beginning of Nature* with the Australian Dance Theatre, which she rejoined this year on the Cunard Queen Elizabeth, performing a bespoke version of the show.



### Tessa Hayward

**Dame Nellie Melba Scholarship  
Annie McFarling Opera Scholarship  
Patrick & Vivian Gordon Award**

With a year full of competitions and auditions to challenge her, Tessa says her main goal in the Melba program is to learn and develop as much as she can as a performer and artist and "to really challenge myself in all aspects of the artform".

Tessa says she is entering many Australian singing competitions this year with hopes to gain financial support to travel overseas and audition

for young artist programs and opera houses at the end of this year and early next year, using the skills she is learning through her Melba scholarship to help with the audition process.

Last year Tessa was awarded the inaugural Dame Elisabeth Murdoch Prize at the Herald Sun Aria Finals and recently she finished performing in the chorus for Opera Australia's *Turandot* summer season.

"I really want to become as skilled and developed as I possibly can through all the Melba blocks and opportunities we receive," she says. "I cannot believe how much I have learnt and how many

wonderful people I have had the opportunity to work with. We have had classes and workshops on language, direction, acting, vocal health, mental and physical health, negotiation, conducting, make-up and hair, just to name a few."

Tessa also works in an ophthalmology clinic and says this has grounded her and made her understand how lucky she is to have good health, opportunities and the Melba program. "I really love connecting with people and that is why I am drawn to opera. To be able to share emotions, stories and connections with an audience is such an incredible gift."

This year's new and returning Melba scholars have settled into a rigorous program of mentor sessions, seminars, workshops and performances. They report here on their experiences and successes.



## Cleo Lee-McGowan

### Joseph Sambrook Opera Scholarship

Confidence and empowerment are two qualities Cleo has watched herself develop this year, her third as a Melba scholar. Feeling fortunate to have so much time with the Melba, she says that while she was initially "quite timid and detested public speaking", she is now consolidating the benefits of the first two years of hard work. In particular she noticed how much more comfortable she felt with the scholar address at this year's Meet the Scholars events, with thanks to specialist public speaking mentor Judith Field.

"As a third-year scholar, my confidence on stage has flourished. Although I still have much more to learn, I now feel comfortable enough to take risks as a performer, and fully commit to artistic decisions," Cleo says. "I have also noticed a dramatic improvement in my vocal technique during my time with Melba Opera Trust, as a result of my ability to make regular trips up to Sydney to work with my vocal teacher and coaches."

Over the past year, Cleo has been awarded several prizes and was a finalist in the 2018 IFAC Handa Australian Singing Competition. Winner of the Sydney Symphony Prize, she will perform the role of Niece 2 in *Peter Grimes* with the Sydney

Symphony Orchestra before relocating to London in September to begin her scholarship at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

In the meantime, she is focussing on ensuring her vocal technique, language and stagecraft skills are secure and ready for the competitive European environment.

"The remaining months that I have with Melba Opera Trust will be focused on continuing to consolidate all that I have learnt in the last few years... then I can't wait to throw myself into my course at the Guildhall and embrace all the new challenges that will be thrown my way."



## Stephen Marsh

### Paulette Bisley Opera Scholarship Eleanor Blakemore Opera Society Scholarship

As with other scholars, Stephen feels fortunate to have another year with the Melba to refine skills he developed during his first year, as well as meeting new concepts. Ahead of him is a big step at year's end: moving to Europe.

Those preparations are largely focussed on his Melba activities, but he also has a busy list of engagements including playing the title role in

Victorian Opera's *The Selfish Giant* (see Page 12), Fiorello in Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and also Count Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro*. "This (Figaro) will be the first major performance for the members of the Richard Divall Emerging Artist Program which is part of Melbourne Opera company," Stephen says. "I will be working hard to have several roles under my belt before I leave for Europe."

This year has been very busy. In February he took part in Melba's three-day workshop with Western Australian director Brendon Hanson and in March did a two-day Melba workshop with Opera Australia director Con Costi.

"In working with both mentors, we have continued to develop our acting and stagecraft toolbox," he says. "We have worked on methods such as Lecoq's 'seven levels of tension' and Stanislavski's 'given circumstances'. These methods have given us a practical framework to adapt into our studies when approaching role preparation." Working with Simon O'Neill has once again been a great highlight, he says.

Stephen was also a member of the Ghost Chorus in Melbourne Opera's production of Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* and played the Grail Knight #2 in Victorian Opera's production of Wagner's *Parsifal*.



## Adam McMillan

### Margaret Schofield Opera Scholarship Mel & Nina Waters Award

Adam's first year with the Melba was a steep learning curve, he says, but this year he is consolidating those gains and making further improvement. "I'm enjoying working together with this year's scholar cohort and growing both musical and professional skills under the guidance of our excellent mentors," he says.

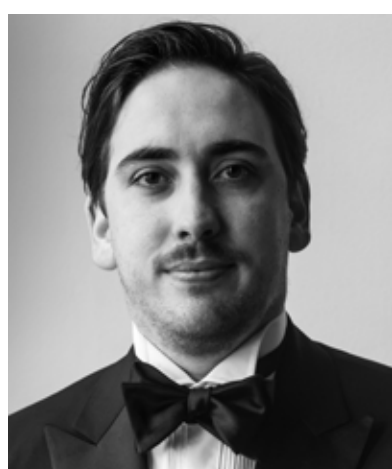
Last year, Adam had the pleasure of giving a recital with duo partner and violinist Kyla

Matsuura-Miller at the Melbourne Recital Centre, in which they performed sonatas by Beethoven and Richard Strauss. In December he worked as rehearsal pianist and performed as harpsichordist in Opera Scholars Australia's performance of Handel's *Messiah*, also working with OSA on tour and in a summer school, in northern Victoria.

"I gained my first serious experience working as a repetiteur in January this year, in Stonnington's The Classics: Opera production of *La bohème*," he says. "This was a very positive experience for me and it was a pleasure to work with conductor Simon Bruckard, who himself has previously been a Melba Scholar."

Adam has been playing piano since he was four years old. He says his persistence, patience and setting high standards for himself have carried him through. "Perhaps most importantly, I feel that an attitude of open-mindedness is key in this pursuit. There are so many different ways to approach music making and having the ability to consider new ideas from teachers and mentors is a key to ongoing improvement."

Making use of his Melba scholarship funding for weekly private Italian lessons, he's also been benefitting from Melba sessions on public speaking and developing rehearsal skills that apply to a variety of situations.



## Samuel Piper

### John & Elizabeth Wright-Smith Scholarship Ryman Healthcare Opera Scholarship

Another returning scholar, Samuel is finding a greater sense of connection this year between Melba mentor sessions and actual performances. As a result, he feels he is benefitting greatly from constantly working and reworking pieces in different scenarios. "Building familiarity and personality in different repertoire is extremely valuable as it helps us develop our own sensibility within that scene or song," he says.

Language skills have been a strong focus with regular Italian conversation classes and a wonderful opportunity late last year to undertake immersion in Italian language and vocal study in Treviso, Italy. "I was able to study five hours a day as well as having a few lessons each week with Sherman Lowe, where we focused on the ideas and repertoire from the *bel canto* period," he says. "I'm extremely grateful to Cav Pellegrino and the Italian Consulate who afforded me this invaluable opportunity."

Now he is looking forward to challenging himself by learning new repertoire; he has picked up several new French arias and songs. "French is the language I am least accomplished in so I'm

confronting it this year with the help of my diction coach," he says.

Samuel says one of the things he is much enjoying is the level of collaboration he is experiencing in the opera world. "I value the chance to contribute and to hear and accept or challenge other ideas," he says. "We are encouraged to have our own personal spin on operas or songs which have been heard for hundreds of years. There is a constant drive to discover one's own interpretation and to make that interpretation your strength. In that way, I appreciate that we are not required to fit a ready-made mold, rather to grow and be flexible according to the context."



## Xenia Puskarz Thomas

### Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship

Xenia's first experiences of the Melba scholarship have not been what she expected. "But in the best way possible," she says. Mentor sessions and close work with people such as the Melba's Sharolyn Kimmorley AM have been "more intensive and challenging than I anticipated, and also the teachers and mentors have been more hands on and involved than I expected, which is wonderful".

Xenia says this intensity has allowed her to be more immersed in her studies and to embrace the

content learned in the sessions. The commitment of Melba mentors, she says, is such that they keep guiding her even when she is home in Brisbane. "I'm really enjoying the challenges set by our mentors and working with and learning from so many different specialists on all aspects of this career."

As with many Melba scholars, Xenia says education on the business aspects of a music career has been an eye-opener. "I wasn't really aware of all the business and professional formalities of which I could take control to present myself as a professional," she says. "From negotiating contracts, presenting a powerful

speech, how to do make-up for TV, and knowing the protocol of formal dinners and business meetings – understanding these aspects has given me more confidence that I'll be prepared no matter what situation I end up in. I feel like I can take ownership of my career to make the most of everything I do."

Last year Xenia won the Lady Fairfax New York Scholarship provided by the Opera Foundation for young Australians. She will begin this in October, working with teachers at the Juilliard School and the Metropolitan Opera. "I'm so excited to explore the music scene and opera world of America."

# Coast to coast

Melba alumni who have moved to the United States tell of their

## MORGAN BALFOUR, SOPRANO ▶

Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship – 2015

Having recently graduated with a master's degree from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music (SFCM), Morgan has now spent a year in the USA devoting herself to new opportunities. At the beginning of last year, she performed two lead roles for SFCM: the title role in *Rodelinda* and Younger Alyce in *Glory Denied*. Morgan was also offered a full-time position with the San Francisco Symphony Chorus soon after graduating, where she says "being conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas and singing at Davies Hall never gets old".

Among other achievements – such as singing with American Bach Soloists for their Summer Festival, and returning to Australia to sing as the soprano soloist with the Canberra Symphony Orchestra at Government House Gardens – Morgan won also the Tony Cuevas Award at the Holt Competition and the Encouragement Award at the Met National Council

Auditions in the Oregon District. In the meantime, she has been preparing to sing in *La rondine* with Pocket Opera, Poulenc's *Gloria* with Chora Nova and Vivaldi's *Magnificat* with the Pacific Choir.

Morgan says one of the benefits of being in the USA is the sheer number of people attending and creating classical music performances, and the volume of professional opera companies, symphony orchestras and smaller organisations.

"The other advantage, I think, would be the huge investment that the USA is making in new operas. I've been lucky to see and perform works that I didn't even know existed when I was back home, such as *Dream of the Red Chamber* by Bright Sheng or *The Shining* by Paul Moravec."

While Morgan says her year at the Melba helped shape the way she approaches many aspects of her career, especially business



Photography: Martin Ollman

considerations, she says her ability to remain positive has been very helpful, too. "I'm fortunate to have a wonderful support network, so it's easy for me to have a sunny outlook on life most of the time. I like being able to bring that mentality to work."



## ◀ REBECCA GULINELLO, SOPRANO

Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship – 2013, 2014

Proud to be one of few Australians accepted into Philadelphia's four-year, tuition-free Academy of Vocal Arts (AVA) program, Rebecca has over the past year had her first USA competition win, AVA's Giargiari Bel Canto, and has also recently performed her first Puccini role: Anna from *Le villi*. "And last year," she says, "my mother came to America for the first time to see me perform the Composer in *Ariadne auf Naxos*."

Rebecca says AVA offers a superb calibre of coaches on its roster, producing a very high success rate for resident artists. She says, though, that it was her experiences at the Melba that have given her a strong sense of how to run a business as a singer, how to prepare herself as a professional through careful guidance in dealing with interpersonal relationships, and being educated about finances – all of which help protect her integrity and reputation in the industry.



Photography: Paul Sirochman, Academy of Vocal Arts 2018

## Letter from Abroad

## PAULL-ANTHONY KEIGHTLEY

Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship (2018)

### *Hallo von Berlin!*

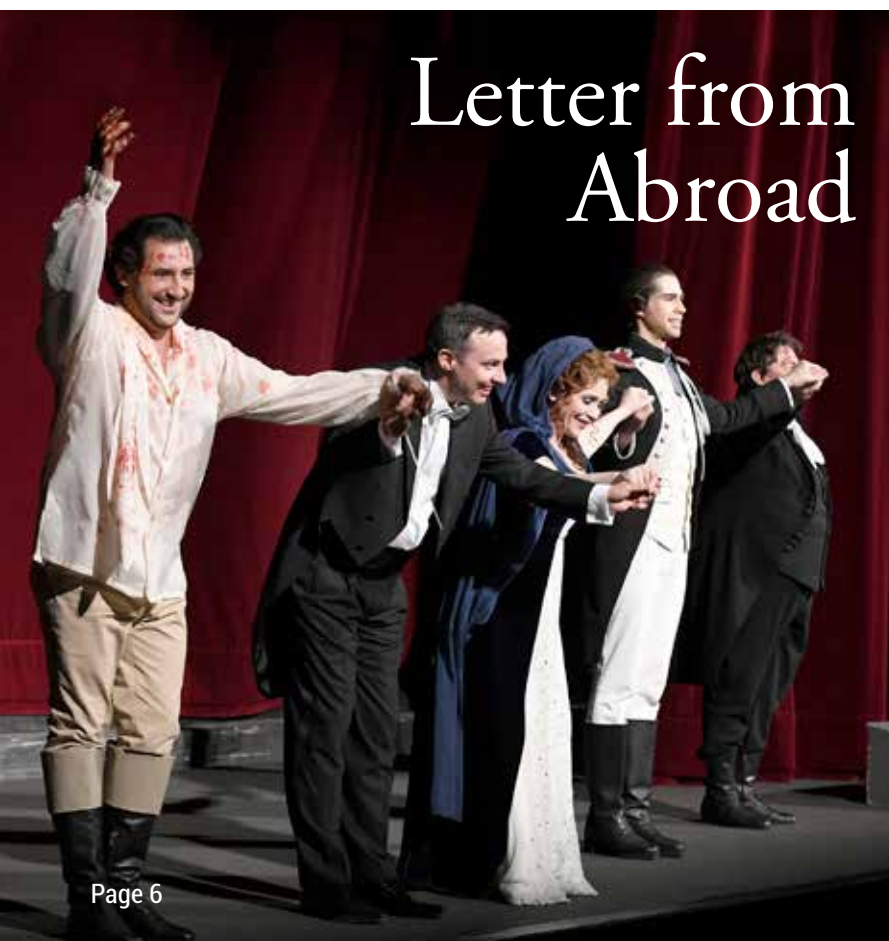
It is hard for me to believe it was nine months ago I packed up my life belongings and made my big move to Germany. Some days it feels like it has been years since I was last in Australia, but at others it feels like it was only yesterday. From the first day I walked through the stage door of the Deutsche Oper Berlin I knew this was going to be the journey of a lifetime. So far this

season I have sung Doctor Grenvil (*La traviata*), High Priest (*Nabucco*), Sciarone (*Tosca*), 2nd Armoured Man (*Die Zauberflöte*) and 5th Jew (*Salome*) alongside some of the world's greatest singers including Anja Harteros, Erwin Schrott, Sonda Radvanovsky and Marcello Alvarez.

Currently I am singing in *Eugene Onegin* as the Captain, with Nicole Car and her husband Etienne Dupuis. For the remainder of the season I sing in *Rigoletto* with fellow Melba alumni Siobhan Stagg and Samuel Dale Johnson, and in *Manon Lescaut* under the baton of

Sir Simon Rattle while revisiting some roles performed earlier in the season. Needless to say, I have been kept very busy during my time as a stipendiat at Deutsche Oper Berlin and I have managed to learn so many important lessons.

Once the current season in Berlin comes to an end, I have a small window to enjoy some summer sun, followed by three weeks in London before relocating to Switzerland. In London I will be taking up the ROSL prize I was awarded from the 2017 IFAC Australian Singing Competition, which will assist my



r extraordinary journeys, opportunities and plans for the future.



Photography: Morgan Ollman

"These important factors are generally overlooked while trying to hone and perfect the artistic and performance aspect of a singing career," she says. "The mentorship and professional development aspects of the program were definitely the most rewarding for me and, in saying this, I feel I have made lifelong connections with the entire Melba family."

Rebecca says her tendency to persevere when faced with challenges has been one of her most valuable traits, especially now she lives so far away from home. "Also,

my natural aptitude for musicality and charisma on stage is something that has enabled me to connect with an audience more. It is the one thing that has given me the most joy. Knowing that my singing is affecting others in a way that makes such a deeply profound impact makes me believe that I have done my job well."

Among her immediate goals will be doing more auditions and graduating with a Post-graduate Diploma in Opera in May 2020. "That will be a huge milestone for me after four years in the USA."

preparation before commencing my new appointment at Theater Basel. For the 2019-20 and 2020-21 seasons I join the company as a member of OperAvenir, a specialised training program at one of Europe's largest and most influential "Dreispartenhäusern" (theatres with their own dance, drama and opera ensembles).

The company is dedicated to contemporary interdisciplinary theatre and the activities of the studio certainly reflect this! I will be singing Colline in *La bohème* and roles in Nono's *Al gran sole*, Martin's *Le Vin herbé* and Honegger's *Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher* while covering Basilio in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and Bartolo and Antonio in *Le nozze di Figaro*. All of this, plus an opera written for children under the age

of two that will be performed in Basel and toured to Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie and to Japan.

I am very happy to be calling Europe home for a while longer. I am constantly in awe of the enormous variety of concerts, opera and theatre that is on offer here. I have seen artists I have long admired from afar and discovered many new names that have inspired my work greatly.

I am sending my best wishes to all of you who make up our Melba community. Thinking of all of you certainly makes me feel a little closer to home and hopefully I will be able to sing on home soil in the near future.

*With all my love,  
Paull*

## JANET SZEPEI TODD, SOPRANO ▼

**Beleura-Tallis Opera Scholarship – 2010, 2011, 2012**

Janet's sense of joy in her work and her ability to remain enthusiastic have helped enormously since she moved to the United States more than four years ago. She says the ability not to be disheartened by setbacks – "because there will always be many!" – has helped her remember that while life as a singer is certainly not easy, her love of singing is why she chose this path.

"At the heart of it, I feel as though I never lose the joy in what I do," she says. "The ability to come back to that has been so valuable."

Little surprise, then, that she has had so much success in the USA. She initially studied at Manhattan School of Music for two years (August 2014 - May 2016) for a Master of Music (performance), then stayed for another year or so, moving to Los Angeles in December 2017. She has been very busy since: in the past year, she has twice had the opportunity to perform

the epic role of Cio-Cio San in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* – first at Opera Columbus in Ohio, and then relearning the role in Japanese for "a very cool bilingual production" in LA with Pacific Opera Project. In that production, Japanese characters sang in Japanese, and American characters in English.

While these have been Janet's most fulfilling achievements, she feels her biggest success this past year has been finding her feet professionally in a new city, building up her presence and networks in the opera community, having arrived as a total stranger.

"In that time, I've gained enough traction to have plenty of work coming up with Pacific Opera Project, LA Opera Chorus and consistent gigs."

Janet, who received the Dame Heather Begg Award in 2015, says some of the benefits of being in the

USA are the exceptional quality of higher education. "Especially in the big cities, there is endless access to world-class teachers and coaches, and the colleges, in my experience, provide a great intensive environment for development," she adds. "I also have to say the incredible work ethic that these young American singers have is a real wake-up call. The drive that is instilled in the singers here really gets you on your game."

Describing her Melba scholarships as having helped in countless ways, Janet says it gave her the ability to get the higher education she needed in New York. "The well-rounded skills Melba teaches its scholars has set me up greatly overseas. And not just musically, but the business side of things too – presentation, functioning as a capable professional in all ways as well as being able to sing and perform. This is so important and has put me in good stead over here."



Janet Szepei Todd as Cio-Cio San in *Madama Butterfly*, for Pacific Opera Project, 2019. Photography: Pacific Opera Project

Paull-Anthony Keightley with Adam McMillan, 2018. Photography: David Ng



# More than a voice

From speech pathology to country music bands and festival directing to music psychology, scholars can forge

**As scholars pass through Melba Opera Trust, paths inevitably diverge...and not only in a geographical sense. While singing and music most often remains at the core of their interests, it is not uncommon for these talented young people to develop careers in allied – and sometimes completely contrasting – fields.**

The Melba's CEO, Amy Black, says professional and personal development are built into the program's philosophy. "A driving force for the Melba program is our commitment to instil relevant, practical skills that will help scholars establish themselves as professional artists," Amy says. "The sessions are designed to support an artistic career but are transferable outside the performance arena as well. Sessions on conflict resolution, time management, negotiation, networking, financial management – to name a few – all aid in the artists being able to think more critically, develop a greater understanding of themselves and develop the confidence to explore areas that they may not have considered before."

Amy says the very nature of the program was forged around Dame Nellie Melba being a fierce businesswoman who demanded that her proteges become 'more than a voice'. "We have been strongly influenced by her principles, which is why we consider the personal development of our scholars equally as important as their artistic. Building skills such as resilience and tenacity is as useful in performance as it is to life itself."

This has certainly been the experience of Melba alumni such as **Hannah Dahlenburg** (Melba Opera Trust Scholarship, 2011-2012; Mel & Nina Waters Award, 2012). While continuing to perform post-Melba, Hannah's first Masters of Music opened up new pathways.

While she is well-known for her performances of Queen of the Night in *Die Zauberflöte* across Australia, Germany and the UK, it

was while finishing her Masters at Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester that she came back to one her great loves – science – through additional Music Psychology research subjects.

Returning to Australia in late 2017, Hannah began a research project in Music Psychology and Performance Science with The University of Melbourne in what she describes as a very under-researched aspect of performers' lives: the transition from university into a career. She is now examining how the activities that support practice and a career might adapt as singers step away from university life and begin a professional life in the industry. Planning to continue her research and eventually undertake a PhD, she also hopes to spend more time abroad in order to be closer to other music psychology research departments. "And to have some more vocal collaboration opportunities as well!"

Hannah says that while she was "a pretty voracious and competitive young singer", the Melba experience was excellent at providing resources she didn't yet know, at that stage, to ask for. "It certainly helped to supercharge my development as a singer, but also encouraged so many transferrable skills that not only supported the business side of my singing, but which impacted the other work I have subsequently done," Hannah says.

In a similar fashion, **Emily Edmonds** (Dame Nellie Melba Scholarship, 2013; Patrick & Vivian Gordon Award, 2013, Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award, 2018) has moved into experiences in an allied field. Having been a Jette Parker Young Artist at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden 2015-17, and enjoying role successes throughout Europe and the USA, Emily has always loved making work that is theatrically and dramatically rigorous. This love has led her to work as a director alongside her singing and last year she was assistant director on the revival of Richard Jones' production of *Der Rosenkavalier*, at the Glyndebourne Festival.



"This work was immensely engaging and rewarding, and I look forward to making and directing my own work in the future," Emily says. "As opera shifts and changes with our times, I believe singers can also be makers, creators, visionaries. We get to choose what our art form becomes. I want to be part of forging a new way. I want to be a new sort of artist who encompasses creativity and making it in many forms."

**Tiriki Onus** (Harold Blair Opera Scholarship, 2012-2013) also embodies this multidisciplinary approach to creativity, working artistically both on and off the stage. Tiriki was an established art conservator, orator, exhibition curator and visual artist for nearly ten years before his entrée to the opera world through Short Black Opera and Melba Opera Trust. He premiered his one-man show *William and Mary* for the Melbourne Indigenous Arts Festival in 2014. The production he researched, wrote, produced and performed himself, tells the extraordinary story of his grandparents through opera and spoken word.

Tiriki's work off the stage shares the same multi-faceted approach. Currently Head of the Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development at The University of Melbourne, he is also a lecturer on indigenous knowledge and cultural practices including the nature and impacts of indigenous art appropriation. Tiriki is in-

demand as a regular panellist and guest speaker at events across Australia, continuing his passion for sharing stories and informing others on the field of indigenous identity, arts, culture and history. He is also undertaking a PhD in materials conservation with The University of Melbourne.

**Nikki Hill** believes her time at Melba (Ruskin Opera Award, 2014-15; Margaret Schofield Opera Scholarship, 2014-15) gave her incredible support, mentorship and unique experiences with which she developed many transferable skills that have assisted and influenced her considerably in pursuing her new career in speech pathology. Having recently completed a Master of Speech Pathology at Griffith University, Queensland, she has also been working in a graduate

speech pathology position at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital. She works closely with adults there who have difficulties communicating or swallowing.

"In my experiences, I have found music to be incredibly powerful when used as a therapeutical means to support patients' post-stroke or neurological injury to communicate," Nikki says. "Many adult patients post-stroke have difficulties communicating, however, they may be able to sing. In these instances, I am able to use music as the modality to assist them in saying their first words again to their family and friends, which I find to be a very rewarding experience."

Singing remains close to Nikki's heart and she recently sang at Opera in the Gardens in Goondiwindi, a charity event raising funds for cancer treatment.

A band called Whistle Dixie and ambitions to perform at Nashville weren't remotely on the radar for **Kyla Allan** when she was at the Melba (Melba Opera Trust Scholarship, 2012). The twists and turns of her career were especially exciting about a year ago when a friend called asking if



Kyla Allan (far left) with Whistle Dixie Band. Photography: Collin Stebbins

Right Stefan Cassomenos. Photography: Belinda Strodger



extraordinary careers beyond the stage.



— Nikki Hill.

she could recommend any singing students to audition for their band. Instead, Kyla asked if she could audition.

"It's been an amazing journey ever since! From ball gowns and elaborate costumes to finding a great pair of Ariats and gingham shirts and dresses, I joined a country, Americana, bluegrass, rockabilly band based in my home town of Newcastle. We have recently recorded an album of originals that's going to get released late June and are headed across Australia to play in various music festivals. We played in the Tamworth Country Music Festival earlier this year. Though I can't yet announce where we'll be playing next...watch this space!"

Kyla says this all follows other amazing post-Melba opportunities such as working with The Seven Sopranos with whom she performed in Singapore, Dubai, China, New Zealand, the Isle of Pines, Lifou and New Caledonia, and toured across Australia. "My dream, even before my dream to become an opera singer, was to be a recording artist and I have also had the amazing opportunity to record on two albums with The Seven Sopranos: the first with a self-titled album for ABC Classics and the second singing some beautiful stage and screen classics from the 1940s and 1950s for Popcorn." She has also toured with Opera Australia's Schools Touring Company (2014) and has been a regular chorister with OA since 2015.

While he has also been performing concertos with orchestras and doing solo recitals and chamber music engagements around the country, **Stefan Cassomenos** (Melba Associate Repetiteur, 2015) was recently appointed Artistic Director of the Port Fairy Spring Music Festival, together with violinist Monica Curro.

Stefan says his intensive study of opera through the Melba has been a welcome influence on much of the work he now does, in particular for programming concerts and festivals. This also applies to his composition work, which this year includes a chamber opera and many other vocal works. "I also continue to give occasional recitals with opera singers, which I've always loved doing."

This year, as well as the festival co-directorship, Stefan will perform concertos as a soloist with Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and Melbourne Chamber Orchestra, and his trio PLEXUS, which has now premiered more than a hundred new works, continues to give regular concerts at Melbourne Recital Centre.

For CEO Amy Black, these 'off stage' successes are to be celebrated and reinforce the importance of the Melba approach. "Of course we love celebrating our alumni performance achievements which represent years and years of hard work, but some of my proudest moments are more subtle: the scholar terrified of speaking in public who delivers an exceptional end of year scholar address; the scholar who struggles to develop conversations with strangers who by the end of the program proudly walks into a crowded room and is the last one to leave; or the shy timid scholar who learns to masterfully negotiate their own contracts with clients and professional opera companies. It's rewarding to know that this program is helping our artists to be the best possible versions of themselves both on and off the stage."

— Emily Edmonds.  
Photography: Victoria Cadisch



# An Autumn Soirée in Sydney

**On a balmy Sydney evening in early April, supporters gathered at the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron to meet (and hear) our 2019 Melba scholars.**

Nestled within the historic Clubhouse built in 1862 with the panoramic backdrop of Sydney Harbour, the performance introduced new scholars Brisbane-based Xenia Puskarz Thomas and Sydney-based Tessa Hayward together with returning scholars Samuel Piper, Georgina Hall and Cleo Lee-McGowan.

Under the artistic direction of renowned director, Constantine Costi and musical direction from Sharolyn Kimmorley AM, the scholars presented an inspired program of opera and song reprised from their earlier Meet The Scholars concert in Melbourne.

Just as impressive as the music was the annual scholar address that Cleo Lee-McGowan so sincerely delivered to the audience, sharing her insights across three years as a Melba scholar and leading into her next adventure on scholarship at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London.

It was also a welcome reunion for recipient Georgina Hall, who was able to share the evening with the patrons of her scholarships: Harold Blair's widow Dorothy Blair, their daughter Nerida, as well as Roz Zalewski-Ruskin.

Following the performances, guests had the opportunity to get to know our scholars over refreshments.

— Above  
Cleo Lee-McGowan and Xenia Puskarz Thomas with James McKenzie and Founding Patron Mary-Jane Joscelyne OAM.

**Right**  
Georgina Hall with scholarship representatives Dorothy Blair, Roz Zalewski-Ruskin and Nerida Blair.  
  
**Far right**  
Margot Ross at the reception following the Autumn Soirée.



**Middle Left**  
Victoria Fox-Smith and Diane Morris.

**Left**  
Xenia Puskarz Thomas with director Constantine Costi.



**Above**  
Xenia Puskarz Thomas performing at the Autumn Soirée.

**Left**  
Tessa Hayward performing at the Autumn Soirée.



**Left**  
Cleo Lee-McGowan delivering the scholar address.

**Right**  
Samuel Piper with The Hon Diana Fisher OAM.



Supporters of Melba Opera Trust enjoying the Autumn Soirée.



Photography: Anna Kučera

# A gateway to the greats of the past

**To contemplate the future, we must understand the past, says the Melba's Sharolyn Kimmorley AM. For this reason, one of her innovations for this year's program has been to introduce scholars to the great singing talents who have gone before them.**

Now integrated into the Melba Mentor Program, the "Insight" series of workshops is delivered by industry professionals who are deeply familiar with music history and, in particular, the work of some of the world's most acclaimed singers of the past.

Sharolyn, the Melba's Artistic Manager and Scholar Advisor, says that during the three sessions for the 2019 Melba scholars, the aim has been to find an inspiring way to bring better information about the past to younger singers who might only be well-acquainted with the world's existing talents.

"The past is so rich," Sharolyn says. "With the Mentor Program, the idea is to open the doors for the scholars – they then have to choose to go through them – and to give them a taste of the past and how that might inform them with their own preparation and knowledge."

Sharolyn considers many of the great pre-21st century singers to be in strong contrast to the present, as they had different singing methods and worked in a completely different environment. "There was more time and people really learnt to sing," she says. "Now, everybody wants to be working and performing well before they probably should. There is such pressure on people to start earning and to be doing performances."

The first session was conducted by Daniel Johnson, estate manager of Coombe Yarra Valley, once the home of Dame Nellie Melba. Daniel focussed on Dame Nellie's feats on and off the stage and deepened the scholars' knowledge about this extraordinary woman's rigorous approach to her work.

The second session was with renowned tenor and voice teacher Glenn Winslade, whose seminar elaborated on why the "greats" are held in such high esteem and how their techniques and attributes brought them such effective ways of working, as well as great success.

The third session will be taken by highly respected conductor and musical director Robert Greene and will focus on Australian singers of the past.

Sharolyn says part of the "Insight" delivery is to educate young singers about the extraordinary array of resources available to them, including ways to go back and hear the people who created such marvellous interpretations of famed roles.

"What I wanted to encourage them to do is certainly to listen to these things but also to *hear* them," Sharolyn emphasises. "I think the real danger these days is that they listen but they don't *hear*; they look but they don't see. Even with a score, they look at the music but they don't actually see what's on the page a lot of the time."

Sharolyn is looking forward to the coming session on Australian singers. Other than Dame Nellie, whom they now know much more about, she suspects they may be in the dark about the enormous list of greats, including John Shaw, Robert Allman, Elizabeth Fretwell, Margreta Elkins, Albert Lance and Jenifer Eddy – and, as Sharolyn says, so many more.

"I want them to be hungry on every level. The education process is much more interesting if you have this background and this hunger. The more information you have, the more interest there is. What we have to encourage is that level of

inquiry in everything they do."

Glenn Winslade says his seminar focussed on the benefits of researching historical performances and vocal pedagogy through resources such as YouTube and Spotify, and composing individual listening lists for the scholars to investigate. "We can't really move forward without looking to the past and there is so much material that used to be unavailable to us," he says. "Basically, everything is there now."

Glenn began with a focus on Dame Nellie and the best recorded evidence of "what a special voice it was".

"There is so much material out there and the students really can't be overloaded with it," he says. "The

intention is, if you can spark an idea in their mind, that maybe they will take on the responsibility and do a bit of researching and investigating themselves. Surprisingly, some young singers don't even know who Dame Joan Sutherland was. Yes, she retired in 1990, but she is still the most famous Australian singer."

## Did you hear...

**Stacey Alleaume** as Sophie in *Werther* (February) and Gilda in *Rigoletto* for Opera Australia (May)

**Damian Arnold** as Snout in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London (February-March)

**Morgan Balfour** as Voice of the Dawn in *La rondine* for Pocket Opera, San Francisco (April-May)

**Daniel Carison** in *Madama Butterfly* (April), *Tannhäuser* (April), *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (April), *Don Giovanni* (May), *Rigoletto* (May) and *Salome* (May) for Hessisches Staatstheater Wiesbaden

**Stefan Cassomenos** as a soloist with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra directed by Christopher Moore (May) and in recital with **Jeremy Kleeman** for Musica Viva (March)

**Zoe Drummond** as Papagena in *Die Zauberflöte* for English National Opera (April)

Fiona Jopson in *Die Zauberflöte* with Clemens Unterreiner (Papageno). Photography: ©Wiener Staatsoper, Michael Pöhn 2018

**Emily Edmonds** as Varvara in *Kátya Kabanová* with Royal Opera, Covent Garden (February) and *L'Enfant* for *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* for Komische Oper Berlin (April-May)

**Lauren Fagan** as Alcina for Internationale Händel-Festspiele Karlsruhe (February-March), Symphony No.9 with Oslo Philharmonic (January) and with **Samuel Sakker** for Tippet's *A Child of our Time* with Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra (March)

**Alexandra Flood** as Gretel in *Hänsel und Gretel* for Bochumer Symphoniker (December), in recital with **Jeremy Kleeman** for Northern Lights Festival, Norway (January), in gala concert with the siaa foundation and Berliner Symphoniker (May)

**Samuel Dale Johnson** as Escamillo in *Carmen* (January), Dr Falke in *Fledermaus* (December) for Deutsche Oper Berlin

**Fiona Jopson** as 1. Dame in *Die Zauberflöte*, Helmwig in *Die Walküre* (January), 3. Norn in *Götterdämmerung* (January) and 2. Blumenmädchen in *Parsifal* (April) for Wiener Staatsoper

**Paull-Anthony Keightley** in *Die Zauberflöte* (January), *La rondine* (February), *Salome* (February) and *Eugene Onegin* (March) for Deutsche Oper Berlin

**Michael Petruccelli** in *Capriccio* (October-November), *Ariadne auf Naxos* (November) and *Le nozze di Figaro* (April) for Oper Frankfurt, and as Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte für Kinder* (January) with Hessisches Staatstheater Wiesbaden

**Jacqueline Porter** with Melbourne Symphony Orchestra for *Fantasy*

and the *Firebird* (March) and with **Jeremy Kleeman** and Melbourne Bach Choir for *St Matthew Passion* (April)

**Samuel Sakker** as Tikhon Kabanov in *Kátya Kabanová* for Scottish Opera (March), *Faust* in *Faust et Hélène* for Royal Stockholm Philharmonic and BBC Symphony Orchestra (April)

**Siobhan Stagg** as Cendrillon for Lyric Opera of Chicago (December-January), as Micaëla in *Carmen* (February) and Adele in *Die Fledermaus* (December-January) for Deutsche Oper Berlin

**Janet Szepei Todd** as Cio-Cio San in *Madama Butterfly* with Pacific Opera Project, Los Angeles (April)

**Sophie Yelland** as Cornelia for *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* for Cardiff Opera (January)

## Listen out for...

**Stacey Alleaume** as Gilda in *Rigoletto* for Bregenzer Festspiele (July-August) and Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro* for Opera Australia (October)

**Fleuranne Brockway** in *Die Zauberflöte* (September), *Carmen* (October), and *Der Rosenkavalier* (November), in 2019 for the 2019-20 season at Hessisches Staatstheater Wiesbaden

**Simon Bruckard** conducting the premiere of his new composition *The Selfish Giant* with Victorian Opera (October)

**Daniel Carison** adding Moralès in *Carmen* (September) Daddy Hogan in *Anna Nicole* (2020) and Ned Keene in *Peter Grimes* (2020) in the

2019-20 season with Hessisches Staatstheater Wiesbaden

**Stefan Cassomenos** in his first season as Artistic Director of the Port Fairy Spring Music Festival with Monica Curro (October) and as a soloist for *Ghost Stories* with Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (November)

**Alexandra Flood** with the Goldner String Quartet (May) and in recital with Chad Vindin (September) for *Australia in Venice* at the 2019 Venice Biennale (visual art)

**Samuel Dale Johnson** as Don Giovanni (August-September), Ping in *Turandot* (October), Angelotti in *Tosca* (November) and Figaro in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (December) for Deutsche Oper Berlin

**Jeremy Kleeman** with **Brenton Spiteri** in the premiere of Geiger *Oscar and Lucinda* for Sydney Chamber Opera (July-August)

**Cleo Lee-McGowan** with Sydney Symphony Orchestra as Niece 2 in *Peter Grimes* (July)

**Stephen Marsh** as the Giant in Bruckard's *The Selfish Giant* (October) for Victorian Opera and Fiorello in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* for Victorian Opera with Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra (November-December)

**Timothy Newton** in *Un ballo in Maschera* (September-December), *La forza del destino* (September), *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (October-November), and *Manon Lescaut* (December) in 2019 for Deutsche Oper Berlin

**Jacqueline Porter** in Mozart *Requiem* (June), Niece 1 in *Peter Grimes* with Sydney Symphony



— Samuel Sakker as Tikhon in *Kátya Kabanová*. Photography: ©Scottish Opera, James Glossop

Orchestra (July) and with **Jeremy Kleeman** for *Handel Messiah* (December) with Melbourne Symphony Orchestra

**Samuel Sakker** as Erik in *Der fliegende Holländer* for Angers-Nantes Opéra and Opéra de Rennes (May-June), Frederico in *L'Arlesiana* for Opera Holland Park (July-August) and Ulrich in *Miss Julie* with BBC Symphony Orchestra (October)

**Brenton Spiteri** as Telemaco, Feaco II and Celeste in *The Return of Ulysses* for Pinchgut Opera (June) and Count Almaviva in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* for Victorian Opera with Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra (November-December)

**Siobhan Stagg** as Artist in Residence for West Australian Symphony Orchestra (November), *Handel's Messiah* with Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, with Ensemble Pigmalion for a series of concerts at Festival d'Aix-en-Provence (July) and Salzburger Festspiele (August)

**Nicholas Tolputt** as Feace I, Anfinomo and Marittimo 1 in *The Return of Ulysses* for Pinchgut Opera (June)



above Jenifer Eddy as Papagena & Geoffrey Chard as Papageno in *The Magic Flute* tour for Opera Australia, 1956.

above Cynthia Johnston, Neil Warren-Smith and Elizabeth Fretwell in *Fidelio* for Opera Australia, 1963. left Dame Joan Sutherland in the title role of *Lucrezia Borgia* for The Australian Opera, 1977. Photo: William Moseley

# Turning points: Roberto Barbaro

**Some years ago, when he was doing his Articles to become a fully-fledged lawyer, Roberto Barbaro was surprised to discover one of his employers had a passion for operatic tenors.**

Later to become a Melba scholar, Roberto was himself a tenor, and he was hugely delighted to discover his boss's favourite tenors were also his own: Nicolai Gedda and Beniamino Gigli. The experience was something of a turning point in his early years in the law, further fuelling his long-held desire to pursue singing – a journey he is now fully embarked upon, living in Europe and establishing an operatic career.

Yet Roberto has had a wonderfully unconventional path towards his current existence. At the heart of all of his pursuits, though, has been a strong desire to contribute to the world at large.

Growing up with an eclectic array of music around him, the young Roberto experienced everything from Mario Lanza, the Three Tenors, Claudio Villa and Toto Cutugno to Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Madonna, Frank Sinatra, U2 and Radiohead. "Basically, it was a mixture of genres all the time," he recalls. "Every family dinner would have music playing in the background."

During his early teens growing up in East Ivanhoe, he would play the piano, organ and violin at the local church and would, for hours on end, sit at his piano at home and play and sing his favourite songs from The Beatles, Elton John and Billy Joel. By his middle-teens, he started joining choirs and participating in school musicals and, in the barbershop quartet for *The Music Man*, he realised singing would stay in his life.

At the same time, he was president of an environment club at secondary

school and going on tree-planting expeditions at weekends, once organising a national sustainability conference with school kids from around Australia.

"I did know that I would be a politically minded individual," he recalls. "As a kid I watched so many documentaries with my grandfather about society and the wrongs of the world. My maternal grandfather was so passionate about world issues that I completely absorbed his thoughts and feelings. I felt that I could carry his torch simply by studying socio- and political science and law."

Thus, his tertiary studies developed naturally: he started in geography at Monash University while in Year 12 (2007), eventually beginning an arts degree and then adding in law studies. Despite his study workload, he continued singing and recalls how he always loved (and attracted) big audiences: during his university days he performed a thirty-minute set of opera and Italian songs at Federation Square for the Italian Cultural Festival in 2009, with a few thousand people in the audience.

"It was scary for a moment," he says. "Then, as I stepped onto the stage, after the first song, I had never felt so alive."

While keeping his music bubbling along, Roberto graduated with his double-degree in arts/law in 2010, entered the legal profession and did work experience for the previously mentioned lawyer who loved operatic tenors...and with it, a new era began.

His boss's enthusiasm had led to him auditioning for a 2010 national tour of a Mario Lanza tribute show as the understudy. At the last minute he was asked to perform the whole tour. He took the plunge.

"Three months travelling around Australia playing the role of Mario Lanza, the tenor I had admired in the past and I felt a connection to, I found who I was," Roberto says. "The audiences were so enthusiastic and often emotional. The fact that I was hired to do a project for an extended period of time gave me the confidence I needed to see singing less as a side passion and more of a potential career path."

At the same time, his legal career progressed: he did his Articles through the Leo Cussen Institute (2011) and worked at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal in Melbourne (2012-13), mainly doing administration support, but also assisting members and judges.

At the end of this, he was offered

—  
Roberto as Frantz in *A Fantastic Bohemian* - Opera MIO, London, 2018.  
© Patrick Baldwin Photography



the inaugural Opera Society Vocal Scholarship with Melba Opera Trust in 2013. This was a joy for him in that it was a time to focus on singing alone. "All my skills on the stage up until that point were limited to my experience and learning from my mistakes. Melba was my first experience being surrounded by singers and constant vocal and theatre coaching. Melba exposed me to coaches that I would not have otherwise had access to and it helped me start to discover what kind of opera singer I am today."

At the end of his Melba year, Roberto was accepted into The Ten Tenors and toured internationally with them, as well as recording, until late 2015. During this time he decided he needed to be in Europe more permanently. In 2016, he applied for a Young Artist Program in Rome, getting a scholarship through the Acclaim Awards, and then a full scholarship financed by Europe Fund to study with opera legend Mirella Freni, who was heading an opera course at Teatro Comunale Luciano Pavarotti in Modena (September 2016-January 2017).

"This all kickstarted my longer term stay in Italy. In the end, I lived in Italy for around two years."

During his time in Italy he also studied with past Melba Mentor Daria Masiero, Valeria Esposito and Vittorio Terranova, and was fortunate enough to perform at Teatro Regio di Parma for the 2017 International Verdi Festival, where he covered the role of Fenton in Verdi's *Falstaff* and performed a concert of various Verdi scenes.

Roberto then headed east to the UK. Last year he was accepted on scholarship at London National Opera Studio, a course that ends this June. Through the studio he has performed widely. His recent performances include Ferrando (*Così fan tutte*) with Scottish Opera, an opera scenes concert as Peter Grimes with the English National Opera Orchestra and conductor Charles Peebles with director Orpha Phelan, and *Last Days* with conductor David Cowen and director Tim Albery at Opera North.

The British debut in *Così fan tutte* was wonderful. "I really wanted to have a stab at a full Mozart role. The first day meeting the cast was a recording session to record some promotional material for the UK tour of the show. The studio was at the Royal College of Music. This was such an exciting experience: to think that I had never studied

in a conservatorium, but now was recording opera in such an iconic venue."

The production travelled around England and will always hold a special place in Roberto's heart as his first UK role and – more significantly – as where he met Honey Rouhani, who played the role of Despina. "She immediately became a close friend, but during the process of touring the strongest of bonds formed." They are marrying in August this year in Tuscany.

He has a new agent now and coming projects include a gala concert with Wimbledon Symphony Orchestra, a new experimental version of *La bohème* for King's Head Theatre Company in London and a role in *Der Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.

With so much behind him – and ahead – Roberto is continuing his strong voice work, but also developing his acting technique with physical exercises to "free the body and mind". "It's hard to explain my approach to singing, but essentially I believe we need to access the sensations of good functioning singing as often as possible in order to 'turn it on' when we are performing."



# A giant challenge

**In Oscar Wilde's short story *The Selfish Giant*, a divine walled garden is presided over by the titular character.**

This man of great stature has a desire to keep his paradise to himself, but this changes when children start using the garden for play. Exquisitely visual and rich with tender emotion, the story seemed ripe for transformation to the stage, says conductor, composer and pianist Simon Bruckard.

Simon, an alumnus of Melba's repertoire scholarship (Margaret Schofield Opera Scholarship, 2016), says that this project began with collaborating with his friend Emma Muir-Smith, a librettist and mezzo-soprano. Both Simon and Emma are former Victorian Opera Young Artists. Their starting point was the challenge of setting the story to music. After writing a few sections, they successfully pitched the idea to the Victorian Opera for the 2019 Youth Opera season. It will soon have its world premiere, with current Melba scholar Stephen Marsh in the title role, along with the Victorian Opera Youth Chorus Ensemble (VOYCE) and other Youth Opera artists.

Simon says composing for the stage is quite different from composing music in its own right, because the music always has to serve the drama. "I love that because I work in opera and it is what I find most fascinating about music: how do you add subtext and atmosphere in all the music you write?"

He describes *The Selfish Giant* as a beautiful story in its simplicity. The original is quite short – about four pages – so it allowed a lot of scope for extension into a one-hour piece of theatre, creating stage-action, developing the characters and jettisoning some of the religious element to make it appropriate for a secular schools program. "It is such a simple fable, and it is really appropriate for children," Simon says. "It has a great moral message that is accessible to all age groups."

While Simon says there is presently much revived interest in Oscar Wilde, Stephen – who was part of the initial workshop development, and is excited to be playing the Giant – says the new music is beautiful, working well with the story and its messages of sharing and being kind to one another.

"This will be the first time for me to play a lead role and I cannot wait to see what will come out of the creative process," Stephen says. "The Victorian Youth Opera was where my operatic journey began in 2011 when I was in the chorus of *Assembly*."

Simon says Stephen will be perfect in the role. "I wrote it with that sort of voice in mind and he will be great as the Giant." It will be directed by Simon's good friend and past Melba Mentor, Cameron Menzies, and while the production design hasn't been settled – it is a small theatre with a large cast – Simon says he is expecting something clever, especially with lighting design.

"The story is so much about beauty and loss of beauty so I think that will be reflected in the design," he says, describing the musical style as "postmodern/eclectic". "I have written it in a way that characters and scenes each have completely different styles of music."

***The Selfish Giant* is at Gasworks Theatre, Albert Park, 17-19 October**

**[www.victorianopera.com.au/season/the-selfish-giant](http://www.victorianopera.com.au/season/the-selfish-giant)**



Bruckard's *The Selfish Giant*, Victorian Opera 2018. Artwork courtesy of Victorian Opera

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