

THE MELBA

MAGAZINE OF MELBA OPERA TRUST

Edition 15 Summer 2016

FROM THE SCHOLARS' REHEARSAL ROOM

LESSONS IN MAKEUP AND STYLING

OUR BEST AUDITION TIPS

WELCOMING BACK OUR ALUMNI

Siobhán Stagg, performing in Brisbane while touring with Roberto Alagna.
Photo by Joseph Byford.

Melba

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A NOTE FROM THE MANAGING DIRECTOR



As this edition of *The Melba* is going to press, the annual scholarship cycle is nearing the top of the dial. Our **2016 scholars** - having completed the year's program - are in the throes of auditions and competitions around the world, that will invariably lead to future opportunities. Meanwhile, the selection process for the 2017 scholars is well underway. The

quantity and quality of applicants are gratifying, and once again we have been presented with a national pool of talented singers.

While this 'changing of the guard' has become the norm for our scholar cohorts, this year's annual ritual is complemented by two significant transitions in the Trust's 'engine room'. Firstly, the leadership of our governing Council is changing, as Chair Rob Logie-Smith hands the baton to Roz Zalewski-Ruskin. Rob took up leadership during a time of extreme uncertainty and he passes on to Roz a successful organisation with a bright future. Below are Rob's reflections on his 11-year tenure.

For the past 18 months, Olivia Giglia has been performing the role of Acting General Manager while Amy Black has been on maternity leave. (A year ago in this column I noted the arrival of the newest member of the 'Melba family', Amy and Clayton's

daughter Charlotte.)

Olivia's exceptional skills and depth of experience has sustained the Trust's momentum during Amy's absence. As the newest member of the management team, the fresh insights that Olivia has brought to the role are some of the dividends of the parental leave system. Amy has recently returned and is working with Olivia to complete the transition. In the meantime, I would like to formally record our gratitude to Olivia for her outstanding commitment and the quality of her work. Needless to say the Trust wishes Olivia well in her future endeavors.

As Melba Opera Trust's 2016 program is nearing the finish line, it is appropriate to reflect on the success of propagating Dame Nellie's legacy vicariously through our young singers. Around the country, the community of Melba

scholars looms large as competition finalists and cast members in every Australian professional opera company. Internationally, our alumni are successfully competing and performing on the stages of Europe, North America and Asia.

We look forward to announcing early in the New Year the 2017 cohort of Melba Opera Trust scholars and to rolling out the program with another year of top practitioner-mentors from Australia and overseas.

This edition of *The Melba* amplifies the scholars' voice, and shares training highlights from throughout the year. We hope you enjoy hearing from your scholars. In closing, I would like to thank and acknowledge the growing family of Melba Opera Trust supporters who make all of this possible.

Peter Garnick

A CHANGE OF CAST: THANKING OUR MAN ON A MISSION



After a decade as the chairman of the Melba Conservatorium and Melba Opera Trust, the esteemed Robert Logie-Smith AM will step down to take a well-deserved break. From November 2016, Roz Zalewski-Ruskin will lead the Trust into its next phase of development from the solid foundations established over the last eight years. We had the opportunity to speak to Rob about his time with the Trust, and his passion for the arts and opera.

"We gave my father's library of music to the Melba Conservatorium, which included a huge collection of miniature scores of chamber and orchestral works. The Conservatorium at the time was well-renowned for having an amazing community, and a great understanding of their students, and so when Dad said "we're going to give it all to Melba", that was great. When I grew up, the only radio station we listened to was 3AR – classical music was extremely important. Dad learnt piano from Roy Sheppard, and though he never got the opportunity

to study music at university as he just missed out on a scholarship, when Roy finished as the director of music at Geelong College, he recommended that the school employ Dad. So he became the director of music. From there, he went on to run Glee Club performing the Gilbert and Sullivan comic operas at Geelong College. He set up the Geelong Orchestra and Choral Society, and became a well-known adjudicator of competitions, as well as adjudicating for the Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB). Music was always in the family, and I used to go to all of Dad's concerts, but it wasn't until later that I got involved with opera.

When I joined the Conservatorium, I decided I needed to learn more about the art form, so I began to spend more time exploring opera and attending performances by singers and répétiteurs. I think we do a good job in Australia at the opera form, and I am passionate, like my Dad was, about not favouring international performers at the expense of Australian performers. There is, of course, a lot to be done to provide more exceptional opportunities to our young instrumentalists and singers in Australia. This is a gap that Melba Opera Trust fills exceptionally well for talented singers. We've demonstrated over our initial eight years that there's absolutely extraordinary talent in this country if we nurture it properly. We do this through the Mentor Program, by Sharolyn Kimmorley AM (Melba Opera Trust Artistic Advisor) and her audition panel selecting the right young scholarship recipients, and through getting some great benefactors, who wish to be involved in the process.

There have been so many highlights during my time as Chairman.

Professor Mel Waters, who was the

exceptional Dean and Director of the Melba Conservatorium, recognized Amy Black (née McPartlan) as an incredibly talented person as well as being a great singer, and once we got going, we appointed her as General Manager, which was a brilliant decision. Once Amy was on board we were able to engage the amazing Sharolyn Kimmorley as our Artistic Advisor which meant we were able to establish a quality process for identifying talented scholars. We were able to build such a strong program on two major aspects of Dame Nellie Melba's philosophy. Firstly, the importance of caring for and understanding of the individual, which we achieve by tailoring our artistic program to suit each singer personally, and secondly, her philosophy that a brilliant voice is not enough, which we say all the time. So we teach business skills through the mentor program, as well as artistic skills. At the beginning, we were able to excite several benefactors, and establish a tight administrative organization, and that initial package is the reason it works so well today. I get enormous satisfaction following the success and achievements of our scholars who are now making a name for themselves in Australia, Europe and the USA. Their success is the key to our future and the growth in our benefactor base. It has been the most wonderful decade working with Melba Opera Trust, and I wish Roz all the best for her time as chair of the Melba Opera Trust board, and look forward to watching the company go from strength-to-strength in the coming years."

On behalf of the entire team at Melba Opera Trust, and the staff and scholars that have passed through the program and the offices, we would like to extend our sincere

thanks to Rob for his dedication, passion and ongoing support. We asked a few members of the organization for their thoughts on Rob's contribution:

Amy Black: The Melba could not have hoped for a more enthusiastic and dedicated leader than Rob. Throughout his time as Chair, Rob has worked tirelessly to support and celebrate the remarkable young musical talent we have here in Australia, initially through the students of Melba Conservatorium and more recently the scholars and alumni of Melba Opera Trust. Thanks to his vision, commitment and determination Australia now has a ground-breaking scholarship program which has already influenced the professional careers of over 40 outstanding young Australian singers and répétiteurs. His inspiring legacy underpins what has been a remarkable chapter in Melba's history.

Roz Zalewski-Ruskin: Under Rob's stewardship, Melba Opera Trust has been extremely successful, and it is a little daunting but largely an exciting prospect to build on his excellent work. The group of people that I have the pleasure of working with are incredibly inspirational and dedicated, and thanks to the resources Rob has developed, the Trust has a very exciting future.

Peter Garnick: When Rob invited me in 2010 to meet to explore a relationship with the newly-formed Trust, I was inspired by the vision that he painted and intrigued with the challenge. Six years on, the success of our young singers is the result of that vision under Rob's leadership, commitment and drive.



Nicholas with his patrons Elizabeth and John Wright-Smith



Nicholas Tolputt - Credit: Winkipop Media



Zoe Drummond – Winner – 2016 Lady Fairfax New York Scholarship
The Opera Foundation for young Australians - Photograph: David Otott

MELBAS CONQUER SYDNEY

A national scholarship program, Melba Opera Trust scouts for talent from across Australia to find exceptional young opera singers and répétiteurs, to offer mentoring and opportunities through our year-long program. We're thrilled to share Melba scholar success – past and present – in Sydney over the past year.

Nicholas Tolputt was shocked to hear his name called out not at just one major competition final, but two in 2016, sweeping up the major prizes in both the IFAC Australian Singing Competition and the Sydney Eisteddfod Opera Scholarship. He is still overwhelmed about taking out the top prizes of two of the most significant Australian competitions for opera singers, insisting that the best advice he had ever been offered was to take his glasses off before he goes on stage, not because it changes his technique, but because it gives him confidence in the fact that he can give it his best when he steps out to sing.

Leo Schofield, director of the acclaimed Brisbane Baroque festival, wrote a moving article about Nicholas' success for the Tasmanian Times after his success in the IFAC ASC, reminiscing about the first time he saw him Nicholas in concert, and the musical journey he had made since that time in 2013. In the first three-minutes of Nicholas' first aria three years ago, Leo recalls nudging his companion to "give him a furtive lap-level thumbs up". Nicholas' was a "fine voice indeed", and one that has since grown substantially in "power and colour". Heralded by several critics and adjudicators for his "depth of emotion", Nicholas

said that his confidence to apply for the scholarships initially came from Melba Opera Trust Artistic Advisor, Sharolyn Kimmorley, who "insisted" that he give it a go. His admirable effort resulted in major successes, which have been the catalyst for a number of exciting engagements in 2017. We are thrilled for Nicholas, and invite you to follow his progress in the years to come as a Melba alumnus.

Repetiteur scholar, **Jonathan Wilson**, tried his hand as a musical director for brand new opera company, Bare Bones Opera. In a triple bill of works by Salieri and Mozart, Jonathan ably conducted from the piano, an experience he called "thrilling". With wonderful feedback for the musicians and the singers, Jonathan's debut has proven fruitful, and he looks forward to continuing his development as a conductor in the coming years.

In a dream turn of events, soprano scholar **Zoe Drummond** was cast in a principal role for Opera Australia's exciting production *Sydney Opera House – The Opera (The Eighth Wonder)*. A testament to her work ethic, and having sung once or twice for artistic director Lyndon Terrancini during her participation in the Melba mentor blocks, Zoe is ecstatic to be cast in the role of Clare Goldring – and was thrilled with the reception after the opera's late October premiere. Zoe is also the recipient of the prestigious 2016 Lady Fairfax New York Scholarship, offered through the Opera Foundation Awards – an incredible achievement that will see her travel to the USA next year.

Sydney has much to look forward to in 2017 too: alumni scholars **Jeremy Kleeman** and **Morgan Balfour** have been announced as leads in the 2017 season for Pinchgut

Opera, performing in *Pigmalion* and *Coronation of Poppea* respectively, and **Stacey Alleaume** will reprise her role as Micaëla in *Carmen On The Harbour* with Opera Australia in March and April. **Melba Opera Trust** will also conduct mentor program blocks in the sunny state of New South Wales in the New Year.

Keep up to date on Melba scholar and alumni activity on the Melba Opera Trust Facebook page or on our website. You're also welcome to call us for more information about our scholarship program, to engage our singers for your public or private event, or to contribute to our endowment to make scholarships and the Melba program for opera development available in perpetuity, please call us on (03) 9944 2100.

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SEASON'S GREETINGS

We've had an amazing year, and you, as a Melba supporter, benefactor, family member and friend, have played a large role.

You are part of our village: encouraging our Mentor Program achievements, Melba Artist performance opportunities and personal projects alike, which has helped us grow not only as singers, but as well-rounded artists – ready to face the challenges that come as part of our operatic career. Thank you for being our champion every step of the way, celebrating our successes and helping us through difficult times. We look forward to sharing our news with you as alumni of the Melba Opera Trust program and for now, wish you a safe, restful and happy holiday season.



PROFESSIONAL POLISH

ETIQUETTE & ELEGANCE

As Dame Nellie Melba wisely pointed out, in order to really succeed in a career as an opera singer, one must be 'more than a voice', and this is increasingly the case in the highly-competitive international opera world. Our Mentor Program is carefully designed to arm our scholars with the skills to achieve just this. Broadly speaking, the Program could be divided into three categories: vocal development, business skills and presentation. In this article, we focus on the latter, and particularly on personal styling, etiquette and protocol.

Appropriate etiquette and a good understanding of protocol are

essential tools for opera singers. According to **Cecellia Telkes**, who runs her own Melbourne etiquette and protocol consultancy, and who has worked with our scholars in 2015 and 2016, there are certain, key points of etiquette that opera singers should note. She believes that adopting good manners is one way of making people feel special, and of being remembered positively.

Cecellia runs a three-hour workshop with our scholars:

'I share with them key principles to good etiquette, and we discuss as many relevant scenarios as possible. The workshop includes a dry run on various dining styles (continental, American, Asian), and Diplomatic-level 'meet and greet' protocol and scenarios they will encounter, for example proper handshakes, excusing oneself from a networking scenario, and showing gratitude and acknowledgement of supporters - all using appropriate words and gestures. I always end the session with a quote from Maya Angelou, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but

people will never forget how you made them feel".'

The opportunity to work with the last two groups of Melba scholars has been very much appreciated by Cecellia:

'They have impressed me with their humility and interest in presenting themselves well. They all come in with the intention to learn, and are active participants. You can teach skills, but you can't teach good attitude. These young singers have all shown a positive attitude, and were a pleasure to coach!'

Taking good care of your appearance goes hand in hand with demonstrating appropriate etiquette and knowledge of acceptable protocol. **Suzanne Dekyvere** of Melbourne consultancy 'An Air of Distinction' runs two general sessions (one for the men and one for the women), lasting about two hours each, during which they discuss the importance of image, and work on deciphering Melba's dress codes. She believes that appearance matters far more than many people realise:

'While we don't want to be obsessed with image as a celebrity might be, it is a dramatic component of how people perceive us. The way we present ourselves leads to assumptions being made about our ability to lead and perform. Our appearance can affirm what our brand stands for, or counter it and lead to doubt about our skills and our ability to follow through. No one needs that in a competitive workplace environment.'

Suzanne adds that we can all be in control of how people perceive us, even before we open our mouths, and lists some visual cues that may work against us: wrinkled, ill-fitting, worn out, faded or stained clothing; scuffed shoes or worn-out heels; unkempt hair, crooked, bent or dirty glasses; jewellery that distracts from the face; and for men, untrimmed beards, unshaven faces or dry skin.

So how does Suzanne work with our scholars in her sessions?

'In the women's session, we determine each participant's individual body shape, and then use "line and design" techniques to work out how best to dress to highlight their best features and camouflage their least favourite. In the men's session, we go through all the rules of wearing a suit, as well as tie and lapel synergy and appropriate accessories. Then each scholar has a flexible, one-on-one session with me. We do things such as shopping trips, colour consultations, and answering more in-depth, personal questions relating to the individual.'

Suzanne finds it 'extremely gratifying working with young, talented singers before they land on the world stage', deriving 'satisfaction from being able to contribute in a small way to their future success'.

Bronwyn Douglass, like all scholars involved, was enthusiastic in her response to these two sessions:

'Cecellia was wonderful to work with. There's no doubt that etiquette and protocol are really important, and she was very thorough in going through common encounters we might face and how we should proceed. I was certainly grateful for the guidance, and have already

been able to apply many of the suggestions she made. Good presentation and style are also essential in our industry, and my session with Suzanne was extremely useful. It has helped me in starting to create a dress guide for myself, and to structure my ideas as to how I want to present myself professionally and in performance.'

In following through on Suzanne's excellent work, our male Melba scholars have been fortunate enough on two occasions to be fitted with D'URBAN dinner suits by expert Andrew Wallace-Smith of Helder Distributors. These are luxury garments made from a high-quality pure wool fabric woven in Biella, Northern Italy using Australian wool. It's not only the fabric that makes these suits, but also their complex construction that leads to a tailored garment. This is achieved in several ways, primarily by the 'floating chest piece', which allows the front of the suit to follow the natural lines of the body.

To Andrew, it is 'most important that these gentlemen feel relaxed and confident in their dinner suit and that it "fits the occasion" of their performance'. Each scholar was fitted individually for comfort and fit, which sometimes required trying on many sizes to get 'that perfect silhouette'. 'It was great to see how excited they were with the finished product. They couldn't wait to show it off', Andrew added, and he looks forward to crossing paths with them again during their singing careers. Melba scholar Daniel Carison attests to the quality of D'URBAN suits, and to the helpfulness of the fitting sessions. He has bought two suits now - a tuxedo last year and a standard suit this year - and is very happy with both.

Perhaps this comment from Suzanne Dekyvere best sums up the importance to our scholars of all these sessions:

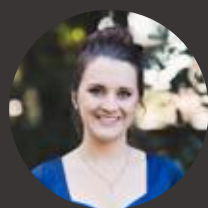
'How you dress, groom and present yourself speaks volumes, it always has and it always will. When you stop paying attention to this fundamental principle, you're likely to stay static in your professional growth or even lose ground.'

A WORD FROM THE SCHOLARS

After a jam-packed year of performances, mentoring and training, we asked our scholars to share their highlights, and let us know what they have planned for the near future. 2016 was a year of brushing up on skills for our performers, and next year takes them all over Australia, and into Europe. Prizes and auditions were won and tours were conquered. Stay in touch with our scholars and alumni by visiting us on social media, or online at www.melbaoperatrust.com.au



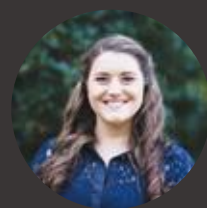
"2016 has been a rollercoaster! I've been fortunate enough to win both the Sydney Eisteddfod Aria and the Australian Singing Competition, which was an absolute dream come true. Singing in both competitions have been absolutely incredible experiences. I loved getting the opportunity to sing for Dr. Erin Helyard, who was very inspiring for me. In 2017 I am excited to understudy the role of David in Handel's masterpiece, *Saul*, presented as part of the Adelaide Festival! It's an amazing opportunity." – **Nicholas Tolputt, Countertenor**



"A highlight from the Melba mentor blocks has definitely been working with Yvonne Kenny AM. I really admire her technique and style. It was wonderful to hear her tips and tricks for the Mozart 'tightrope' arias. This has been an incredibly busy time, but very, very exciting! I have been enjoying the events celebrating The 7 Sopranos new album, 'Popcorn- Songs of Stage and Screen' as well as receiving my first contract with Opera Australia for '*Sydney Opera House- The Opera*'." – **Zoe Drummond, Soprano**



"The master class with Dr. Erin Helyard was a particularly inspiring part of the program. Erin's passion for early music was infectious and I felt immensely curious and excited to learn more. I'm thrilled to be performing the role of Papageno in *The Magic Flute* for the Malaysian Philharmonic in January, under the baton of Guillaume Tourniaire who I was lucky enough to be introduced to through the Melba Mentor Program. Following that, I have an exciting 2017 recital program, with fellow Melba, Jonathan Wilson!" – **Daniel Carison, Baritone**



"In the first week of September I had the chance to sing for one of my idols Richard Bonyngne AC, CBE as part of the Bel Canto Award. I was honoured to be awarded the 3rd Prize DECCA Award, Universal Prize and Sydney Philharmonia Choirs Prize. I was also lucky enough to make the finals of the prestigious Herald Sun Aria! I'm excited to be performing in Handel's *Messiah* with the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic in Melbourne Town Hall in December" – **Bronwyn Douglass, Mezzo-Soprano**



FACE FIRST

STAGE MAKEUP: DIARY OF A MENTOR PROGRAM SESSION

For the first time this year, Andrew Keshan from Opera Australia mentored Melba scholars in the essential area of stage makeup. Andrew took this session in the professional makeup room at the State Theatre during the busy Melbourne opera season in May. Having worked at OA for 21 years, 10 of those as Head of Performance Wigs and Makeup, Andrew is supremely qualified for this role. After working with our scholars, he generously provided the following in-depth report on the experience. It offers a wonderful insight, both for opera lovers and for those people potentially interested in pursuing a career in this art form.

'Good stage makeup is vital, both for performers and audience. For the performer, it gives confidence to take on a character removed from themselves. This is particularly relevant when playing a character whose appearance is quite different from theirs – more mature, younger, of different ethnicity, for example – or with a different personality – sinister, clumsy, naïve, innocent, dangerous, jolly, and so on. As a performer has makeup applied, or applies it themselves, and their appearance changes in the mirror, it helps them become the new character that emerges, and to take on the personality, traits, mannerisms – even the way they walk and stand. This can be likened to putting on a costume or a mask. And from an audience point of view, good stage makeup gives visual insight into the character, even before the plot unfolds, and helps in the story-telling.

I decided to work with the women and men in separate, smaller groups, as it is much easier to give individual attention, and also because I wanted to teach them skills specific to their gender. So it was 'ladies first'. While some productions still call for the more traditional, theatrical stage makeup, many designers and

directors are now aiming for a more natural look that is not so different from photographic makeup, so I started with this. In chatting with the scholars at the beginning of the session, I discovered that two were mezzo-sopranos and one a soprano. It's not uncommon in opera for mezzo-sopranos to be called on to play the part of a young boy or adolescent ('pants' roles), so this was our first task, which demonstrated how using a very small amount of makeup can completely change one's appearance. We gave the face a 'no makeup' look, and made the eyebrows subtly heavier and less manicured. We then added some soft shadow on the top lip to mimic the soft down a boy grows as he enters puberty. This was entertaining for the girls as they transformed into their younger brothers!

Next we worked with very natural stage makeup, using natural brown and soft pink tones to create a fresh look, with rose-coloured lips and natural mascara. This gives young characters a vibrant and fresh 'peaches and cream' look for the stage. We added to this to develop a more dramatic look, applying liquid gel eyeliner along their top lashes to achieve a classic, 1950s-style flick. This can look fantastic with plenty of mascara and a strong red lipstick, and it's a commonly-used look that can be varied with eyeshadow and lipstick colours. We then aimed for something stronger with highlighting and shading to help contour the face, working from subtle to stronger as the singers became more confident. The goal of this exercise was to make them less fearful of heavy makeup, as well as to get used to their own face and features, learning what to bring out and what to disguise in order to change the look of a character, and how to make features softer or sharper depending on the type of character. We then went even further, using a darker shadow in the eye socket for a dramatic look, false eyelashes and strong red lipstick. By the end of the class, I think they all looked like young divas, ready to hit the stage in the most dramatic of operas!

A few days later I worked with the four guys: a bass, a baritone, a tenor and a countertenor. We started off

with a very natural stage look, which I explained could also be used for a photoshoot, for headshots, or for a concert or recital. This basically involved concealing any blemishes or complexion irregularities and powdering to reduce shine, brushing through the eyebrows, removing any makeup from the lips and applying a clear lip balm to reduce dryness.

After that we made the makeup a little heavier, adding a natural eyeshadow to define the eyes more. Makeup for the eyes is fantastic in changing the look of a character; it can make the eyes pop and appear more youthful, or make them darker and deeper to help create a more sinister character. We used eyebrow shapes to show how this creates a different character, from friendly arched eyebrows to more evil pointed eyebrows. From here, we developed a more aged look by adding character lines where they would naturally appear through the expressions of the face: bags under the eyes, crows' feet, furrows in the forehead, frown lines, snarl lines beside the nose, and cracked lips using foundation stippled onto a puckered lip and jowls. We used contouring and shading to highlight different facial features and soften others to create a new character, and also stippled a five o'clock shadow onto the face, progressing from a slightly unshaven look to a more substantial shadow.

The men found this entertaining as well as informative, and seemed to have lots of fun discovering what their own faces could do with the aid of some basic makeup skills. In both classes, the singers were first shown a demonstration on half of a face. They then worked on their own faces to complete the look. Everyone had the opportunity to be a model, and everyone completed each task.

I think it was a very worthwhile exercise for the singers, as it simplified what can be a complex, complicated and daunting process. My aim was to take the fear and uncertainty out of it, and to provide the scholars with skills to confidently approach the task when they are required to do their own makeup. I chose the most common scenarios so that when they are faced with those situations, it won't be the first time.

Those entering the performing arts, and more specifically the world of opera, need to be armed with all the knowledge they can acquire for their stage craft, and makeup application is a major factor in this. They won't always have the luxury of a professional makeup artist, so a little bit of basic knowledge, skill and practice goes a long way in adding to their confidence in performing a role.

The sessions were really enjoyable, and there was clearly a good bond between the singers, who were eager to learn as much as they could. I still feel very passionate about stage makeup, and felt very privileged to have the opportunity to meet the singers and play my part in their learning journey. I look forward to the opportunity to work with them again. What a fantastic group!

The feeling was obviously mutual. Melba scholar Daniel Carison describes how he put his upgraded knowledge of stage makeup into practice for his role as Cinderella's father Pandolfe in Victorian Opera's production of Massenet's *Cendrillon* in July:

'I had to do my own makeup, which is why it is an important skill to have as a performer. I needed to age myself somewhat in order to look significantly older than my colleague, Kate Amos, who was playing Cinderella. I achieved this in several ways: I grew my facial hair out and left it somewhat unkempt in order to look a bit worn down. I used a very light foundation throughout my hair and beard to take the darkness out of my beard, and then used a white chalk palette to create strong whiteness in my hair. I added bags under my eyes with eye shadow and, using a combination of shadow and pencils, accentuated my brow lines and any wrinkles that I have.'

Bronwyn Douglass similarly found her session with Andrew Keshan 'excellent':

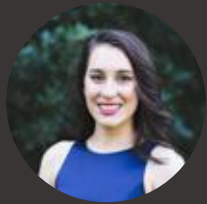
'To have guidance from someone with so much experience working within the industry is invaluable. As a mezzo-soprano, it was also really useful to start exploring makeup options for pants roles, and ways to look more boyish on stage.'



"There have been many highlights this year, particularly having the opportunity to work with Yvonne Kenny AM and Dr Erin Helyard. I enjoyed taking part in the *Pagliacci* chorus with Victorian Opera, and learning to Cuban dance for *Our Man in Havana* with Lyric Opera (I was reluctant at first, but found it rewarding in the end!). I am looking forward to the Lisa Gasteen National Opera School, and playing the principal role of Olin Blitch in Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah* with Opera New England in January." – **Timothy Newton, Bass**



"Working with Yvonne Kenny AM was the most wonderful experience, as she's such an incredible wealth of knowledge. Not only is she a great singer, she's a brilliant teacher with a wonderful way of communicating with young singers. Performing in a lead role in Victorian Opera's *Laughter and Tears* was an amazing experience and next year, I'll be performing the role of Der Minister in the company's *The Princess and the Pea* which I'm really looking forward to! I also plan on heading overseas to do some auditions around Europe" – **Michael Petrucci, Tenor**



"To be a part of Victorian Opera's most recent production of *Laughter and Tears* was an exciting professional project. Once again it was a joy to work with American director Chuck Hudson for the second time this year. After a successful season of *Cinderella* and *The Pied Piper* with Victorian Opera, I am excited to be a member of the cast presenting these two operas to the students and communities of Regional Victoria on our upcoming tour!" – **Shkira Tsindos, Mezzo-Soprano**



"A real highlight for me this year was the Mietta Song Competition. The opportunity to perform at the South Melbourne Town Hall for a very distinguished jury was fantastic, and winning was an added bonus! I also tried my hand at being a musical director for the first time with Bare Bones Opera, in an exciting triple bill of works from Mozart and Salieri. I'm looking forward to learning more with Melba Artistic Advisor Sharolyn Kimmorley when I head to Queensland to take part in the Lisa Gasteen National Opera School." – **Jonathan Wilson, Repetiteur**



"The opportunity to work with Dr Erin Helyard in master class was a real highlight for me. It's great to work with someone who is an expert in their field, and I received a lot of practical advice. Conducting Richard Mills' *The Pied Piper* for Victorian Opera was a great experience for me. It's good to work with community groups and children's choruses, which make for a very fun production! I'm looking forward to the Lisa Gasteen National Opera School this year, and then heading to London in 2017 to work in the opera industry." – **Simon Bruckard, Repetiteur**



L-R: Fiona Jopson, Lee Abrahmsen, Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, Timothy Newton, Bronwyn Douglass - Photograph: Daniele Martinie

THERE IS NOTHING LIKE A DAME

Melba Opera Trust, founded on the philosophy of Australia's operatic royalty, Dame Nellie Melba, had the great privilege of welcoming two new Dames into our fold during 2016. It was a great pleasure to add Dame Kiri Te Kanawa and Dame Felicity Lott to our exceptional line up of Melba mentors.

An integral aspect of Melba Opera Trust's multi-faceted Mentor Program is the opportunity provided to our scholars to participate in master classes with international and Australian opera singers who have developed successful careers performing in the major opera houses of the world. In 2015, for example, our singers worked with sopranos Daria Masiero, Emma Matthews, Yvonne Kenny AM, Merlyn Quaife AO and Renée Fleming, as well as with mezzo-soprano Deborah Humble and tenor Simon O'Neill. And to date in 2016, Daria, Yvonne

QUESTIONS FOR DAME KIRI TE KANAWA BY BRONWYN DOUGLASS

How did you first become exposed to operatic repertoire and when did you realise that it was your artistic calling?

My mother discovered I could sing at the age of 3 – initially I sang only very simple songs, I sang on the Radio at the age of 6 and I continued singing light rep until

the age of 12, at which point my mother decided to move the family from Gisborne to Auckland so that I could have singing lessons. Once in Auckland my mother enrolled me in to St Mary's Catholic School, to be taught music by Sister Mary Leo, a renowned singing teacher. Initially I became a choir member and sang

church music. By the age of 14 my voice had developed to the point where I was introduced to classical music.

By the age of 18 I was studying privately but still not sure what direction I wished to pursue. At the age of 21 with pressure from my mother and having won the

Melbourne Sun Aria, Mobile Song Quest and various other singing competitions it was decided that I should go to London to study formally at the London Opera Centre. At 22 I was fairly clear that I wanted to sing classical music.

I have read that in your late teens and early twenties you performed a lot of popular music in New Zealand. Do you still enjoy singing cross-over material as well as classical repertoire? As a young singer

interested in developing a varied repertoire, what is your advice for switching between operatic and musical theatre or popular styles?

I consider myself to be an opera singer and feel my voice is suited to classical music, however I have sung lighter music, cross-over, show tunes etc. I enjoyed singing lighter music but always feel I am naturally comfortable with the classical repertoire. You cannot be both and will very quickly discover

QUESTIONS FOR DAME FELICITY LOTT BY TIMOTHY NEWTON



As well as being acclaimed worldwide for your operatic roles, you have been a strong advocate for song repertoire and devoted a significant portion of your career to song, chanson and Lieder – what drew you to this repertoire and would you advise young singers to invest their time in developing their song repertory?

I began with song, like most people, I suppose. Everybody sang all the time in my family. I loved Rodgers and Hammerstein, Gershwin, Cole Porter. I had singing lessons and learnt 'Voi che sapete' (Cherubino's aria from *Figaro*) in English: Say, ye who borrow.....can't remember what they borrowed; that was opera of course. I didn't think I would be a singer of any kind, and certainly not of opera.

I sang in the school choir and the church choir so I knew quite a lot of religious music, Handel's *Messiah*, Britten's *Ceremony of Carols*. I read French at university and thought maybe I could be an interpreter, but I always kept up my singing lessons. I spent a year in France and found a teacher there; she sent me on a summer course in Nice and the teacher there made me learn some French songs by Debussy which I loved. I heard another student sing Ravel's 'Asie' from *Sheherazade* and thought it was amazing. I realised I wouldn't be an interpreter, at least, not that kind, and finished my degree and auditioned for the music schools in London. When I went to study at the Royal Academy of Music I met Graham Johnson who loved/ loves all kinds of songs and we performed a lot of Lieder and French song, and Britten and Walton. The repertoire is so vast and so varied. Each song is in a way a mini-opera, full of emotion and drama. I always managed to keep a balance between song recitals and opera performances throughout my career. I would

advise young singers to explore this repertoire and to try to popularise it once more.

The tradition of song singing is sadly diminishing in the age of technology in which we live – how can we preserve this tradition and keep the art both alive and relevant to a modern progressive society?

Singing songs with piano is very good for the voice so is to be recommended for young singers. Good program planning is essential if you want to win over an audience: a whole program of songs about death is perhaps not such a good idea, however beautiful the music. Our modern society seems to want variety and soundbites, but if you can get them interested, song is so personal and so intimate, and in recital you can speak to your audience and tell them what you like about the songs and what to listen for. I was most impressed in Australia with your naturalness and your introductions to songs and arias. Audiences love that. We are involved in a niche market though...

How do you know which roles are right for you, and how would you advise young singers struggling to navigate the labyrinth of advice and recommendation from coaches, conductors, and directors alike regarding appropriate repertoire and roles?

I didn't really know much opera – there are still huge gaps in my knowledge – so if someone suggested a role I tried to find a recording to get some idea. Then I could see whether a) I had the notes b) I sympathised with the character c) I could imagine myself saying/singing what was required of me. I hope I would have someone intelligent whom I trusted to help me decide: a teacher or a coach who didn't have a vested interest. Sometimes conductors don't understand voices. You need a trusted ally, or to be very determined. It's so flattering if someone you admire thinks you would be just wonderful in a demanding role. Sometimes it can work, but it's a bit of a gamble. I've probably always been over-cautious,

and Deborah have again shared their wisdom and expertise with our scholars.

We work hard to enlist international experts like these to train our scholars to the highest possible standard, and to cultivate in these young singers the essential global understanding of the industry necessary if they are to further their study and careers overseas. Most importantly, the opportunity exists for our scholars to build and maintain contact with these mentors, extending their individual networks, and facilitating career opportunities, both in the short and longer term.

We have concrete instances of the value for our scholars of making these contacts. For example, in 2013 at the ‘Hobart Baroque’ festival, David Gowland, Director of the Royal Opera House Covent Garden Jette Parker Young Artists Program, gave a master class for four Melba Opera Trust scholars. Against extremely fierce competition, two of these scholars – Emily Edmonds and Samuel Dale Johnson – subsequently auditioned and were accepted into the Royal Opera House Covent Garden Jette Parker Young Artists Program. More recently, current scholar, bass-baritone Daniel Carison, sang in a master class given this year by conductor Guillaume

Tourniaire. Daniel was subsequently invited by Tourniaire to audition for the principal role of Papageno in Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* with the Malaysian Philharmonic (January 2017), and was awarded the role.

We are particularly excited to have added two new, renowned and highly-respected mentors to our program in 2016: British soprano Dame Felicity Lott and New Zealand soprano Dame Kiri Te Kanawa. On Monday July 18 in the Tallis Pavilion at Beleura House & Garden in Mornington, Dame Felicity gave a master class where alumni sopranos Hannah Dahlenburg and Fiona Jopson performed, along with current scholars, countertenor Nicholas Tolputt and bass Timothy Newton. Among the audience members was Anthony Knight OAM, Director of the Tallis Foundation, which generously supports the Mentor Program. He shared his impressions with us:

‘I suspect there is no better way to perfect something than being guided by a master in the field – an experienced person at the peak of their career and somebody who has given and achieved so much, and been through the ranks, the mill, the lot! For a non-musician to see how a master class works is fascinating, and especially when the master is of international repute. Dame

Felicity Lott was surprisingly very gentle, almost self-effacing in the way she advised the young singers. She treated them with great respect, and seemed to be attempting to put them at ease and get the best out of them by making suggestions, but also seeking their opinion. I also found it fascinating how the singers were able to remember and take on board these gentle hints. It’s rather like crafting something by adding layers, feelings and colour. We are very happy to be part of the Mentor Program, particularly as it accords with John Tallis’ hope that the Foundation can help young people, and what better way than through expert mentoring!’

Munificent Mentor Program supporters John and Elizabeth Wright-Smith were also present, and kindly told us about their experience, “Dame Felicity was gracious and softly spoken, allowing the singers to continue for many minutes before commenting. She stood to one side, only walking to centre stage to make suggestions. This she did respectfully, offering comments like, “Of course you have a beautiful voice, now let’s try that”. She worked on body language and facial expressions – for example in conveying emotions such as jealousy and anger – and the response was quick. During the sumptuous afternoon tea break,

Dame Felicity demonstrated her unassuming nature, telling us how much she missed her beautiful farm on the coast in Cornwell, and particularly her husband and her lovely cows! She also voiced her displeasure at getting her Wellies stuck in mud during the English Summer!”

And more generally on master classes of this nature offered through our Mentor Program, John and Liz had this to say:

“Students attending master classes discover what the real world of opera is like. The information and guidance given by the top national and international artists is invaluable, and would probably be unobtainable otherwise at this stage of their careers. Each mentor is welcoming and affirmative, and has different experiences to share. For example, I remember clearly when, back in 2013, Bryn Terfel told the scholars he had auditioned 102 times before he achieved success as a young singer!! There is always hope. The more our scholars can be exposed to such high standards through these master classes, the more likely they are to develop into world class singers.”

We had the great privilege to welcome Dame Kiri Te Kanawa in late October, where Lady Southey

AC kindly hosted her in master class at Cranlana. It was an enlightening opportunity for the singers involved, who received wonderful “industry truths” and helpful technical support. Having created the Kiri Te Kanawa Foundation over ten years ago, Dame Kiri is passionate about assisting young singers with financial support, judicious mentoring and career assistance, and as such, had huge amounts of knowledge to impart on participants Fiona Jopson (alumna, 2010), Lee Abrahmsen (guest of MOT), Bronwyn Douglass and Timothy Newton. The day, which included a long discussion with Dame Kiri over lunch, was “incredibly interesting”, according to Bronwyn, who learnt a lot from “the discussion about how to use colours when you’re performing. Bringing colours to your sound and also to your character makes the piece much more exciting. She was an absolute wealth of knowledge!”

Melba Opera Trust would like to acknowledge the generous benefactors of our Mentor Program: John and Elizabeth Wright-Smith, Charles Allen AO, Joseph Sambrook and Mary-Jane Gething, the Opera Society, Opus 50 Charitable Foundation, and of course the Beleura Tallis Foundation. We remain deeply grateful to all of them.

what music suits you. My greatest successes have been in opera. As a rule in opera you do not sing with a mic and as such you rely on your natural voice without the assistance of amplification. The musical styles are also very different. As I say you cannot be both – decide early what suits your voice and stick with that.

The Kiri Te Kanawa Foundation creates so many opportunities for up and coming performers to help them develop international careers. What

is the best advice you could give to a young singer moving overseas?

I set up the Kiri Te Kanawa Foundation in 2004 with the principal aim of identifying exceptionally talented singers and musicians, then nurturing and mentoring that talent to the point where the individual has the technique, ability, self-confidence, drive, ambition, determination, business awareness, etc.

I must be brutally honest now and say the singing profession that I knew and worked in is no longer there and the opportunities for young singers are far fewer, with far more competition.

You have to be the stand out from the start, be the ‘total package’: have the voice, languages, style, interpretation, looks, repertoire, maturity, etc. You must have your finances in place, the right Visa, accommodation, singing teacher

who is right for you and be prepared to accept less than your own expectations. You will need £30.000 sterling minimum per year to study abroad and may need to finance 4 years of study.

Your first international success was as the Countess in Mozart’s Marriage of Figaro at the Royal Opera House. Can you tell us about this initial experience at Covent Garden, and what it was like preparing for a principal role?

I spent 6 months learning the role of the Countess in Italian at Covent Garden. Whilst doing so, the opportunity to sing the role came up in Santa Fe, New Mexico first, except I had to sing in English. This meant relearning the role in English, performing 6 shows in the United States, then returning and relearning the role in Italian for Covent Garden. It basically took a year to get the role in to my voice. Looking back I would say I was fully prepared for the role and enjoyed it immensely.

but a little caution is perhaps a good thing.

Your illustrious career has taken you around the world; is there any place to which you have an affinity or to which you are drawn back?

Well, my great love was always France and the French language, so I go there as often as I can. I’ve sung at the Opera Bastille, Garnier, Opera Comique and the Châtelet, as well as Lyon and Lille, and have given recitals all over the country. Because I have always said how much I love France, they are very kind to me. I also loved singing in Vienna, Munich, Chicago and New York, but France is where I love to be.

It is customary in questionnaires of this kind to ask what you would do if you weren’t a singer. Do you have other interests outside of music and singing, and do those interests inform your musical decisions and your interpretation of songs or roles? Music is after all a reflection of life’s varied experiences and events.

I have really no idea what I could have done. I’m a reasonable cook...I like to garden a bit, used to sew a lot of my own clothes. I like to visit art galleries and I like to read, but making money in another career would have been a problem.

Was a career in music something that was planned meticulously or something that came about by chance (or perhaps a mixture of the two)?

The teacher I found in France said that perhaps if I worked a bit harder at my singing I might be able to do something with that; I was completely at a loss as to what I might do after my French degree. When I was a student at the Royal Academy I sang the roles of Dorabella and Pamina – we weren’t put into such strict ‘boxes’ then, and realised that I enjoyed performing. I was never particularly ambitious, but people asked me to do interesting roles and I kept saying yes to them. I had a very good agent – the same one for the whole of my career – and he was clever and not greedy. He would often say ‘You’ve been asked

to do this, but you shouldn’t do it.’ My lucky break came when I was understudying Pamina at English National Opera and had to go on – in 197...5, I think. I was very bad at auditions, but if I could get on stage and forget about being me, I was a bit better.

At the expense of asking a so-called “leading question”, does your preparation of a song or aria start with a strong understanding of the text?

Obviously understanding the text is crucial or you can’t put it across. I will admit that I haven’t always been as prepared as I should have been in languages I don’t speak. I must have given some bland performances. I am interested in language though, and need to know how a sentence is constructed. I speak French and German and a bit of Italian. I find it very difficult to learn noises without understanding exactly what they mean; that’s the main reason I haven’t sung in Russian or Czech. I would have to learn the language and I always seemed to have too

many things to do. I have missed out on some wonderful roles as a result and I’m not proud of myself.

In Australia, we suffer from the tyranny of distance, which makes it difficult to learn and practise languages other than English. How do you prepare arias or songs in foreign languages, and how do you imbue the text with a genuine understanding and comprehension of the words?

We are luckier in Europe, but I suppose it all started with school as far as French was concerned. I had excellent teachers and also went to spend time in France from quite an early age. German was harder: I didn’t like it! But I loved the songs, particularly Schumann. Graham played me a recording of Lotte Lehmann, famous Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier*, reciting poems of Goethe, and it was so beautiful, I changed my mind. When I began to sing Strauss’ operas, the words I had to say/sing were so beautiful and so profound that I began to love this language. It certainly makes

a huge difference if you can go to the country and be immersed in the language, but the internet is a tremendous help now. And there must be good coaches around for all the more ‘usual’ opera languages?

Do you like to sing any cross-over repertoire such as music theatre? What is your favourite music to sing outside the classical cannon?

My attempt at crossover began with Offenbach arias, not crossover at all really, but they started me on the slippery slope to lighter French music which I love. I have so far resisted Piaf and Brel because they are so distinctive and I don’t think I could get close to interpreting their songs. I’ve sung ‘Losing my Mind’ by Sondheim, which I think is a great song, and a whole program of Richard Rodgers which I loved, but I don’t feel as at home there as I do with the French musical numbers. I do have a secret wish to do a kind of high-class cabaret in French, English and German, with songs from the 1930s/40s. Would you have a venue for me?

FINDING THE NEXT MELBA



Repetiteur scholar Jonathan Wilson in rehearsal

There are no other scholarship programs like it in Australia and Melba Opera Trust is fortunate to receive very high-level applicants. Each year, applications continue to increase in numbers and standard, and a competitive edge is critical to be successful in receiving one of up to eight coveted Melba opera Trust scholarships for a year. Here is the lowdown on the necessarily comprehensive and rigorous selection process, from initial online applications to live audition.

On visiting Melba Opera Trust’s ‘How to Apply’ page, potential scholars learn that online applications open on 1 September, and must be submitted by 30 September each year. Clear and detailed application information includes facts like Melba Opera Trust invests \$80,000 per scholar across the following three programs:



Artistic Development

The Artistic Development Program, provides scholars with a cash component to underwrite an individually-tailored program addressing a balance of vocal development, languages, stagecraft, movement and professional development activities. In consultation with Melba Opera Trust’s Artistic Adviser, singers and pianists nominate their preferred training providers.



Mentor Program

A key scholarship benefit is access to the internationally regarded Mentor Program, consisting of a series of workshops and seminars that take place in Melbourne and Sydney over the course of the year. National and international experts are enlisted as Mentors in the Program that focuses on equipping scholars with practical business, performing and independent thinking skills for life as freelance artists, whilst also establishing and growing the essential professional and supportive networks for continued development.



Melba Artists

Thirdly, the Melba Artists Performance Program creates performance opportunities for scholars to put their learning into practice, from large concerts in metropolitan and regional venues to intimate private gatherings and special events. Singers learn how to prepare and execute their own performances and interact with clients and audiences, while also raising their performance profiles.



To be eligible to apply, singers and pianists must be aged 21-28 years old (though this can be extended in exceptional circumstances), and need to have completed (or nearly completed) an undergraduate degree in voice or piano (for our repetiteur scholarship), or an equivalent program of operatic/vocal/piano studies.



Aspirants need to meet the selection criteria: to demonstrate outstanding potential, including relevant skills, dedication and commitment, self-motivation, organisation, availability for Mentor Program sessions and Melba Artists performances, and the potential to be ambassadors for Melba Opera Trust.



Naturally, there’s also a list of rules: decisions of the panel are final; successful applicants must use the funds in Australia; and material provided in online applications must be in the correct file formats and of high quality.



Armed with this information, and hopefully undaunted, applicants complete an online application form in which they identify key challenges to their development and how they plan to meet them, and describe their understanding of the expression, ‘In order to succeed in opera you need to be “more than a voice”’. Applications include a CV and a brief performance biography along with a high quality recording that follows specific repertoire guidelines, to be shared with the adjudicating panel via YouTube or Vimeo.



Finally, they must devise a proposal for their artistic development, including vocal, languages, stagecraft and movement (e.g. acting classes, dance, gesture, physiotherapy, Feldenkrais, Alexander Technique), and professional development (e.g. headshots, media training, website creation, performance psychology, recordings, purchase of scores and performance attire).



From 1 October, it is then the selection panel’s task to choose a shortlist of applicants to be invited in for a live audition and interview. This year’s panel, chaired by Sharolyn Kimmorley AM, includes Deborah Humble, Graham Pushee and Amy Black.

‘Firstly, there’s one thing that is essential: applicants should sing appropriate repertoire. Singers often choose music that is beyond their current level of development, and this does not allow them to “perform” to their capacity in their audition. As to what we’re seeking, we’ll be looking for outstanding vocal potential – artists who we feel have the capacity to pursue a career as professional singers. This implies a secure vocal technique, knowledge of languages, stagecraft experience, and most importantly, that certain, indefinable “special” quality that makes each performer unique.’ – Sharolyn Kimmorley AM



Live auditions take place in early November and this is where the audition panel work incredibly hard to determine which of Australia’s outstanding young opera singers will be granted the opportunity to join the Melba community as a scholar. 2017 Melba Opera Trust scholars will be announced early in the New Year. Good luck to you all!

BAROQUE & ROLL



LEARNING THE ART OF BAROQUE ORNAMENTATION AND STYLE WITH DR. ERIN HELYARD.

Baroque opera has, in the past few decades, enjoyed a resurgence of popularity

across Europe, and since 2002, specialist opera company Pinchgut Opera led by expert Dr. Erin Helyard and Antony Walker, has brought the thrilling genre to Australian audiences.

The company has become known for unearthing rarely performed Baroque and early Classical gems, inviting opera lovers to discover something new both aesthetically and musically. The orchestra performs on period instruments, creating a sound that is in one breath historically informed and electrifyingly new. The work of artistic director Dr. Helyard has attracted huge praise from critics and audiences, with Australian and international stars of opera flocking to sing for the company. The Melba

Opera Trust scholars were lucky enough to participate in a master class with Helyard in September, a most exciting opportunity for both the singers and pianists.

Heralded for his exceptional authority as both a conductor and harpsichordist, Dr. Erin Helyard is an exciting addition to the Melba Opera Trust Mentor Program, bringing his knowledge of early music performance practice to the scholars. As well as his versatile performance career, Helyard’s work as a senior lecturer in musicology and historical performance was noted fondly by the scholars who were lucky enough to participate, almost all including it in their top

three Melba moments for 2016. Baritone Daniel Carison “learnt a huge amount” in what was an “engaging and inspiring session” with a master. “He had a wonderful way of making every piece of music he worked on with individual scholars relevant for the rest of the participants, offering anecdotes and advice that we could all work with and take away”. For Nicholas Tolputt, current John & Elizabeth Wright-Smith Scholarship holder, it was a “dream come true to sing for Dr. Erin Helyard, because he is absolutely one of the world’s leading experts when it comes to Baroque repertoire. To be able to pick his brain about baroque style and ornamentation was fantastic, and his approach was really refreshing and engaging. I

AUDITION TIPS FROM THE MELBA SCHOLARS —

Learning how to nail an audition is an art form in and of itself. No strangers to the process, we asked our nine current scholars to dish the dirt on their success secrets. The verdict? Be yourself and be as prepared as your possibly can.

"My main tip is to practise singing the vocal lines with the accompaniment. Be able to sing, or at least play, every vocal part. Even if you have to simplify the piano reduction, this is an important part of the audition. The other main thing is to know the orchestration. Write into your score when it is strings, winds etc and listen to recordings to get an idea of how it actually sounds. You can decide not to play everything as written, as long as it sounds like the orchestra." — **Simon Bruckard, Repetiteur**

"It is particularly important to make a good first impression and to this end it is advisable to enter the room with confidence and to introduce yourself to the panel, shaking hands with each panellist individually, if appropriate. It also goes without saying that it is an obvious advantage to know about the organisation or company for which you are applying, and why the scholarship/program will be advantageous to you and your career as a professional singer." — **Timothy Newton, Bass**

"Pick music that you are not only comfortable with and favourable towards, but that have been singing for some time. With all the doubts and nerves that come into play during an audition, one thing we can control is our preparation. Know the music well, be clear about your artistic choices and get the music into your body. Forget that there is an audition panel in front of you and present your work as though you were in recital or concert. If you can do this, the audition will take care of itself." — **Daniel Carison, Baritone**

"My biggest tip for prospective applications of the Melba Opera Trust Repetiteur Scholarship, is to spend time getting to know the text of the set excerpts for the audition. Spend time learning the correct diction for the pieces you are playing, and look carefully at the full orchestral score. Also expect the audition to be an educational experience, as it involves a coaching with esteemed vocal coach and accompanist Sharolyn Kimmorley." — **Jonathan Wilson, Repetiteur**



"I think the most important thing for auditions is to have your music totally prepared and confident. Auditions are daunting, and unexpected things happen – so it is a comfort to know exactly what you are presenting. If you perform to your best, then the rest of the experience is out of your control. It sounds cliché, but just give them your best! If they like it – yay! and if they don't – you can still hold your head high and just try again. Be the constant in the variable situation!" — **Zoe Drummond, Soprano**

"My approach to the auditions has always been to really (really) know your repertoire, back-to-front. After this I've always tried finding just one thing to focus on and try my hardest. This can be the acting of the piece, the text, the vocal quality, anything definite that you can feel confident about. Going into the audition with this one idea in your mind I find to be a lot more grounding and calming than trying to offer everything at once!" — **Nicholas Tolputt, Countertenor**

"Auditioning for Melba Opera Trust for the first time was not nearly as scary as I anticipated. The panel of highly esteemed industry professionals and artists hope to find great potential in young singers and repetiteurs in order to nurture and support the beginning of their careers. This means that you should in no way feel the need to present yourself as 'a finished project'. As a young singer and performer, the MOT creates many opportunities to further develop your skills." — **Shakira Tsindos, Mezzo-Soprano**

"For me, being successful in an audition is all about the preparation. It is imperative that you know your arias back to front and inside out. If you are auditioning with arias in different languages make sure you have translated them word for word so you are able to colour the text. Also take the time to meticulously check the pronunciation of each word and any other language specific nuances, for example liaisons and elisions in French arias and double consonants in Italian arias." — **Michael Petruccielli, Tenor**

"Remember your strengths! I know it sounds simple but I think it's common as young singers to work so much on improving and "getting things right" that we forget what we do well. By all means focus on polishing your audition pieces as much as possible, but I always find it useful to leave some time to go over what I do well, so that I'm not only working on those tricky corners but also playing to my strengths." — **Bronwyn Douglass, Mezzo-Soprano**

found him very inspirational." For a countertenor, the opportunity to work with such an expert was "thrilling". The Baroque repertoire, which is notoriously hard for the tricky ornamentation that comes as part and parcel of the era's writing, is exactly the style in which a countertenor will obtain most of their work. Bass scholar Timothy Newton noted that each participant "improved substantially" as the day progressed, impressing that it was a "great privilege" to work with such an expert in his field.

Leading from the harpsichord or the piano requires an extra something of the conductor – the ability not only to become the orchestra, but also to navigate through dense scores while supporting the singers you are accompanying. This is a

daily practice for repetiteurs, and one that comes with trial and error and consistent work. Having the opportunity to witness Helyard conduct from the piano was insightful for Melba Opera Trust repetiteur scholars, Simon Bruckard and Jonathan Wilson. Both pianists have begun their conducting and artistic directorial journeys in the past year, with Simon conducting the premiere performances of Richard Mills' *The Pied Piper* for Victorian Opera, and Jonathan taking on the role of artistic director for Bare Bones Opera's *Mozart and Salieri – A Triple Bill*. In Jonathan's case, his debut as an artistic director threw him right into the deep end of leading from the piano bench, as was the norm during the lifetime of composers like Mozart, Salieri

and other well-known Baroque and early classical writers. Helyard demonstrated from the piano, offering our repetiteur scholars to view his technical methods and how he uses gesture and breath to guide a singer through their aria and recitative.

An overwhelming success, the first Baroque master class run by Helyard will, most likely, not be the last. Tenor scholar, Michael Petruccielli summed the experience up perfectly, saying "Dr. Erin Helyard helped us unravel the mystery of Baroque ornaments, and it was a really enlightening day especially for those of us who sing a lot of romantic repertoire. Today opened up the possibilities of Baroque repertoire, and made us a little more confident."



Dr Erin Helyard demonstrates a passage to repetiteur scholar Simon Bruckard



Alumnus Brenton Spiteri with founding patron Mary-Jane Joscelyne in Lyon



Siobhán in concert with Roberto Alagna, by Joseph Byford



Samuel Sakker as Alfredo Germont in La traviata (C) ROH. Photographer Neil Gillespie

MELBAS AT HOME

In increasing numbers, our Melba alumni are enjoying success overseas in European and American opera houses, validating our three-tiered approach, as well as these young singers' own talent and hard work. It's equally gratifying to see them return to Australia for varying lengths of time to share their development and experience with Australian audiences, as several have recently done.

Earlier this year, tenor **Brenton Spiteri** returned from Lyon, where he performed in the recently-discovered Offenbach work, *Le Roi Carotte* with the Opéra de Lyon. He also studied privately with the head of the opera studio there, performed in small concerts and continued his studies in French – extremely important as he needed to speak dialogue audibly and clearly in an enormous theatre.

Brenton will be heading back to Lyon in early 2017, but in the meantime has been extremely busy in Australia, starting in February by singing Tamino in *Mozart's The Magic Flute* for the State Opera of South Australia, a role he'd learned over a number of years studying at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music and as a Melba Trust scholar:

'I'd wanted to sing this role for a long time, and was excited about returning home to finally do so, at what turned out to be exactly the right moment for my voice. I also had a great time playing the role of Clotarco in Pinchgut Opera's production of Haydn's *Armida* in June, alongside an extremely talented Australian and international cast, from whom I learned so much, in addition to gaining valuable performance experience. I look forward to taking this knowledge to my next engagements, whether overseas or here in my home country.'

Brenton has also worked with the Sydney Symphony

Orchestra, Brisbane Baroque, Sydney Chamber Opera and Victorian Opera this year, as well as taking part in a number of concert performances. And no matter where he is, he aims to stay in touch:

'I particularly enjoy maintaining my connection with the Melba community through emails, social media, and sometimes in person, even when I'm far away from Melbourne. It was wonderful that Mary-Jane Joscelyne was able to visit me in Lyon and attend a performance of *Le Roi Carotte*. It's great to know that I have such strong support, regardless of where I am in the world.'

Performing alongside Brenton as Zelmira in *Armida* was 2015 Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award winner, soprano **Janet Todd**, recently returned from her studies at the Manhattan School of Music. It's clear that reviewers as well as audiences appreciated the opportunity to hear the vocal development of these two alumni. *Financial Times* highlighted Brenton's 'beautifully clean and polished tones', while *Limelight Magazine* referred to Janet's 'agility', 'bell-like purity' and 'effortless top' notes.

It was equally delightful to have former Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholar **Siobhán Stagg** back on our shores during a break from her commitments on the European stage where alongside her role as a principal soloist for the Deutsche Oper, she is booked up into 2019 with performances all over Europe and in her native Australia. On this occasion, Siobhán was back for a two-week tour as local support artist with French-Italian tenor Roberto Alagna, during which they performed concerts at the Sydney Opera House, Melbourne's Hamer Hall and the Brisbane Convention Centre. For Siobhán, making her debut at the Sydney Opera House was a particularly poignant experience:

'Growing up in Mildura, I used to always sing around the house, but had no formal training at that stage. At the age of 12, I sang 'Amazing

Grace' at my grandfather's funeral in Bairnsdale, and a distant cousin said to my parents afterwards, "It's probably worth getting Siobhán some singing lessons. She's got a bit of a voice there". As we were leaving, she slipped a 100-dollar bill into my hand with a note that said, "This is for your first singing lessons, and please invite me when you sing at the Sydney Opera House". It took 16 years, but the concert with Alagna on 21 July was the occasion!'

Like her fellow Melba alumni, Siobhán enjoys the opportunity to continue to perform in Australia as well as overseas:

'A lot of singers go overseas, and you don't necessarily hear of them again in Australia, but it's important to me to do both. It can be difficult to schedule, because often Australian orchestras and opera companies cast later than their European counterparts. But it can work for you if you already have your calendar for the next years, and you have a gap that fits with an Australian engagement. The Alagna tour was an example of this, having been organised about a year ago, which is actually relatively last-minute! I'm happy that I have two projects here next year as well. I'm always going to try and keep the Australian part of my schedule alive.'

Recently, the scholars were lucky enough to be visited by **Samuel Sakker** (2012-2013 Margaret Schofield Opera Scholarship recipient) during his trip to Australia between seasons at the Royal Opera House. Initially accepted as a young artist in the Jette Parker Young Artist Program, Samuel was announced as a company principal for their 2016/17 season in April this year.

The scholars were thrilled to welcome back Samuel for an industry lunch in August.

We at Melba Opera Trust certainly hope that we will continue to be able to derive pleasure from having our alumni return to share their artistry and success with Australian audiences.

ALUMNA TAKES HOME THE PRIZE

We were thrilled to be in the audience on October 26 to hear two Melbas in the finals of the prestigious 2016 Herald Sun Aria at Hamer Hall in Melbourne. Current scholar Bronwyn Douglass (Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship) and alumna scholar Panayiota Kalatzis (Ruskin Opera Award and Mel & Nina Waters Award recipient, 2013) both performed exceptionally well, with Pana taking home the grand prize in the end, including a \$15,000 cash prize and a \$22,500 scholarship for overseas tuition.

Founded in 1924, the competition has spurred on the careers of many major Australian and New Zealand opera singers, with winners including Melba Mentor Dame Kiri Te Kanawa (1965), and alumna scholars Brenton Spiteri (2012), Stacey Alleaume (2013) and Fiona Jopson (2015). The Aria is one of the largest prizes for opera in the country, with the name alone carrying considerable weight. Pana told the Herald Sun that she "never thought it would happen", but when it did it "changed everything. She now plans

to go back to the United Kingdom, having spent a considerable amount of time there already studying for her Masters in Advanced Vocal Studies at the Wales International Academy of Voice. Singing 'Ernani, ernani involami' from Verdi's *Ernani*, and Massenet's moving 'Pleurez, pleurez mes yeux' from *Le Cid*, Pana impressed judges with her stage presence and captivating top notes. Enormous congratulations to both Bronwyn and Pana – we are exceptionally proud of you.

Photograph: Stuart Walmsley



LETTER FROM ABROAD: ALEXANDRA FLOOD

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 1 2016

Since moving to Munich in September 2014, I have managed five trips home, all to sing. This letter comes to you from Sydney, where I am a finalist in the Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyngue Foundation Bel Canto Award, and recaps the year to date of amazing performance experience, professional growth, incredible opportunity and travel. For the first time this year, the Bel Canto Award held international auditions in London, Vienna, and New York, which opened it up to the top young Australians globally and I am grateful to have been selected as one of six finalists and to be sharing the stage with Melba sister Bronwyn Douglass in a few days, to sing Dame Joan’s repertoire for warm and welcoming ears at Verbruggen Hall.

I am at the tail end of what could be described as a world tour. After finishing a long run of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* in Bregenz, Austria in February, I returned to Munich for a brief period to continue my Master’s, before receiving the surprise call to audition for Violetta in a dramatic re-working of *La traviata* by Lotte de Beer, a young Dutch director. It was unexpected and flattering to discover that someone on the opera grapevine suggested to Lotte that she listen to me sing. Violetta is a dream role for me, but I was apprehensive to take on such a role so young as I was hoping to make my Violetta debut closer to 35, not 25. But Lotte’s company, Opreafront, flew me to Berlin and we immediately understood each other. After singing both arias, the conductor, Steven Sloane, and Lotte offered me the role on the spot. It felt like a big risk to participate in a radical re-working of Verdi’s classic, but at the same time, I was thrilled to accept it.

The new production, *Traviata Remixed*, was premiering in Amsterdam as part of Grachten Festival and rehearsals started only a few weeks later. So, I quite suddenly found myself moving to Holland, and it became the start of my five-month tour. After an incredibly rewarding and creative

rehearsal period in Amsterdam, I auditioned for Maria in *West Side Story* in Italy, then over to Kraków for a 5-hour trip to audition as Norina in *Don Pasquale* for Opera Kraków – and was pleasantly surprised to be offered both parts.

At the end of May I returned to Australia as the soprano soloist in the Queensland Ballet and Queensland Symphony Orchestra’s record-breaking, 5 star production of *Strictly Gershwin*. Brisbane was a brilliant experience. A full immersion in the detailed artistry of ballet at once inspired and humbled me. I thought opera singers had it tough, but I have never seen anyone strive for perfection like those dancers. And the stakes were always so high. One wrong turn could mean a career-ending injury. One tiny lapse of concentration, and the magic of a performance could be lost. That experience refocused development of my own craft, which was most useful for my arrival at Wolf Trap Opera.

As a young artist at this wonderful opera festival in sweltering, steamy Virginia, USA, my vocal skills were tried and tested. The program was demanding, but supportive, with myriad vocal, musical, psychological and spiritual coaches at hand. This was my first appearance in the United States and I was curious to

see how I would fit in. My voice was one of the smaller instruments in the group, but what I lacked in size I made up for in musicianship and expression. A highlight for me was stepping into rehearsals of *L’opera seria*, for the soprano whom I was covering, where I worked scenically with Matthew Ozawa (one of the hottest directors in the USA), an incredible learning experience. I left Wolf Trap feeling accomplished, but also acutely aware of how I could further improve. I look forward to returning to the United States in the years to come.

Following the hot American summer, I returned to Amsterdam for the *Traviata Remixed* premiere in August. I felt so passionately about this project. Because the scenic work a few months earlier had been so in depth and creative, I felt I was the first person in the world to ever perform this role. And in a way, I was because every production of every performance is different in some way. There is no one identical Violetta. Even between my own performances, subtle changes, choices, a different glance, a set jaw, a graceful gesture, made Violetta fresh and dynamic every night. Just as we learn and change as human beings, so do our characters. I look forward to coming back to Violetta in the future, and discovering new nuances in her.

Lotte’s production was a wild success, with reviews of her work universally outstanding and so it was a privilege to be part of this significant reworking of a popular opera. I was overwhelmed by the reception of it, and honestly astounded at my own sense of achievement. As a direct result, other work offers have flowed through, including calls from some of the major opera houses of the world, so taking the risk on Violetta in *Traviata Remixed* has paid incredible dividends.

Over the coming months, I look forward to a number of exciting

projects. The day after the Bel Canto Award in September, I fly to Hannover to start music rehearsals for *La finta giardiniera*, in which I will be singing Serpetta for the Lower Saxony Music Festival. Singing a Mozart part is a welcome respite following the Verdi. Mozart grounds us. The voice is so exposed in the orchestration, that excellent technique must be a focus of the preparation. And Serpetta is the kind of fun Mozart character I don’t often get to play; she’s smart and spicy like Blonde, but as spikey as the Königin with her retribution. A pocket rocket, to say the least.

After the Hannover performances at the end of September, the pace picks up again with the opening gala concert of the Mallorca Music Festival in Spain, where I will reprise my much loved “Sempre libera” (*Always free* – the aria from ACT 1 in *La traviata*). Following Spain, I travel to Sydney to join Dame Kiri Te Kanawa and Teddy Tahu Rhodes for orchestral gala concerts on board a luxury cruise liner during a 7-night tour of the Pacific. Then I immediately return to Munich to undertake my Master’s recital before preparing for my role debut as Norina in *Don Pasquale* at Opera Kraków in December, where I will sing alongside superstar baritone Mariusz Kwiecień.

I feel I am on a remarkable journey. The more I travel, and the more engagements I experience, the more I recognise how crucial my training and development with Melba Opera Trust was, even as a scholar for just one year. Today, for example, I made some major accountancy and tax moves, based on the knowledge I garnered from Melba seminars. The musical coaching and singing training I was afforded as a recipient of the RJ & AF Hamer Scholarship was crucial in getting me to this point and the Trust and its affiliates continue to be a major support to me. The Melba office is always one of the first contacts I email when I have exciting news to share! Or

when I need help or advice. Olivia, Sharolyn and the team were an essential help in supporting my visa application to the United States this year, which enabled me to work at Wolf Trap. Lawyers and agents alike told me it would be highly unlikely for me to qualify for the specific visa I needed, but Melba’s help and support got me across the line, and I am forever grateful.

And here we are back to my little Airbnb. Today’s focuses are: score study for Hannover, packing (always packing), squeeze in as many moments with loved ones as possible, and have an early night in preparation for the Bel Canto final tomorrow. I will open with “Ruhe sanft, mein holdes Leben.” The first lines of the aria are: “Peaceful rest, my precious life, sleep until happiness wakes you.” It is a piece I’ve always seen as a lullaby to myself. The peace that Mozart brings us is ethereal and yet grounding. So if you’re ever on a long-haul flight, and you hear Zaide’s sweet melodies wafting down the aisle, don’t worry. It’s just a delirious soprano, trying to lull herself to sleep.

Until next time

A note from the Melba team:
We are thrilled for Alexandra’s successful year and on her behalf share a particularly glowing review of her *Traviata Remixed* performance in Amsterdam, in August.
“Alexandra Flood ... debuts in one role after the other, and was a perfect choice as Violetta. With her appearance and her highly dynamic vocal she was the star of the show.” - Place de l’Opera Magazine

AN EVENING OF OPERA AT STOWELL PARK



In early September Lord and Lady Vestey, alongside our patron The Hon. Saffron Foster, generously opened their home, Stowell Park, to host *An Evening of Opera* featuring Melba Opera Trust alumni. Set in the idyllic Cotswolds countryside, the evening celebrated the continued legacy of Lord Vestey's great grandmother, Dame Nellie Melba and the scholarship awards annually through Melba Opera Trust.

A reprise of the hugely successful event held in late 2014, the evening featured superb performances by alumni Lauren Fagan, Jade Moffat and Samuel Sakker, all young artists currently forging their careers in UK and Europe. Joining Lauren, Jade and Samuel was esteemed Australian vocal coach and pianist Linnhe Robertson, making it a very special Australian line-up that would have made Dame Nellie

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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.

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