

IN MELBA'S FOOTSTEPS
COVENT GARDEN CALLS
FOR EMILY EDMONDS
PATRONS BRING OPERA INTO
THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES

The Melba

Magazine of the Melba Opera Trust

Shauntai Batzke, Harold Blair Opera Scholarship

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A NOTE FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER



Whilst I am busy tuning in to a very new voice, I am delighted to welcome to the cast Acting General Manager, Olivia Giglia. Olivia brings to this position a breadth of arts management experience with the artistic understanding of a Bachelor of Music. I know that Olivia is looking forward to connecting with everyone at future Melba events and will be a superb champion for our Melba program.

In the process of preparing my handover I have enjoyed some reflective moments around the journey and impact of this dynamic organisation.

Of the 34 young singers who have participated in our program, 16 of our alumni are successfully establishing international careers and another 14 are engaged professionally with either national, state-based or independent touring opera companies. That is quite a remarkable outcome given that our program began just six years ago.

In 2008 we launched a ‘promise’ that was founded on an entirely unique approach to operatic development: balancing professional business know-how with artistic development. In addition we believed that our most outstanding young operatic talents should be nurtured here, in Australia, to ensure that they have the best chance at establishing a professional operatic career, be that in Australia or overseas.

We were – and still are – a small organisation with big aspirations and a potent legacy to uphold. As a result we now have exceptional young artists pursuing operatic careers in London, New York, San Francisco, Manchester, Munich, Berlin, Switzerland, Salzburg, Lyon, New Zealand and Wales not to mention Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.

AFTER 12 EDITIONS AND 10 YEARS OF MELBA ACTIVITY, THIS WILL BE MY FINAL ‘NOTE FROM THE GM’ FOR A TIME. IN JUNE I WILL BE ‘RETREATING TO THE WINGS’ TO PREPARE FOR AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT ROLE – THAT OF NEW MUM.

I am enormously proud of our singers. The successes we continue to share with you are testament to their incredible tenacity, commitment and resilience. The road for an aspiring opera singer is undeniably tough. Having seen first-hand the heart-wrenching disappointments and sacrifices that often underpin these successes, I can truly say that our scholars are a source of inspiration.

We have developed a framework to provide the breadth of skills that our singers need in order to propel their careers forward. At the same time, however, success relies on the individual singer embracing the process and realising the opportunities being presented – a partnership in the truest sense of the word.

This culture of partnership extends beyond the program into our community. Over the past six years, the opportunity to read in these pages how our programs have evolved has inspired many of you to personally invest in helping to ensure the careers of these exceptional young people.

Thanks to the Melba family, we raised \$6.5 million for our capital endowment. Our goal is \$9.5 million which would provide financial sustainability and guarantee that the stories of success in the pages of *The Melba* will continue for future generations of aspiring Australian talent.

Clearly our journey is not yet complete and we ask you to continue your support, be it through tax deductible donations, an annually pledged gift or a lasting bequest. Every contribution brings us closer to ensuring that we remain Australia’s premier scholarship program for our most promising operatic talent.

Finally, I am often asked by our supporters where they can hear our scholars perform? We are not a

‘performing’ arts company as such and many Melba Artist performances are for private clients. However, we have heard your call and thanks to an exciting new partnership with Melbourne Recital Centre, we have two wonderful concerts scheduled in the Salon later this year (please see details below).

Featuring scholars and alumni, these concerts are a new Melba Opera Trust initiative and we would love for our scholars to perform to a ‘full house’ so please tell your friends. In closing, I offer my personal thanks to everyone who has been involved with the Melba, including my terrific team in the office. I look forward to reading all about the next exciting chapter in the Spring edition.

BAROQUE TO BROADWAY

Monday 20 July, 6.00 pm

Featuring:

Nikki Hill

Jade Moffat

Brenton Spiteri

Daniel Carison

Stefan Cassomenos

AN DIE MUSIK

Tuesday 1 September, 6.00 pm

Featuring:

Alexandra Flood

Nicholas Tolputt

Jeremy Kleeman

Stefan Cassomenos

Ticket info

Tickets \$38.00 (\$28.00 concession)

Visit melbournerecital.com.au for ticket bookings

2015 MELBA SCHOLARS

Dame Nellie Melba Scholarship
Patrick & Vivian Gordon Award

Jade Moffat

Amelia Joscelyne Memorial
Scholarship

Morgan Balfour

John & Elizabeth Wright-Smith
Scholarship

Nicholas Tolputt

Joseph Sambrook Opera
Scholarship

Jeremy Kleeman

Harold Blair Opera Scholarship &
Mel & Nina Waters Scholarship

Shauntai Batzke

Margaret Schofield Opera
Scholarship & Ruskin Opera
Award

Nikki Hill

RJ Hamer Opera Scholarship

Zoe Drummond

Opera Society Vocal Scholarship &
Beleura-Tallis Opera Scholarship

Daniel Carison

Associate Repetiteur
Stefan Cassomenos

ABOUT MELBA OPERA TRUST



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

Inspiring Excellence – Realising Potential – Forging Careers



MEET THE SCHOLARS

OUR ‘MEET THE SCHOLARS’ OCCASION IS A HIGHLIGHT OF OUR ANNUAL CALENDAR AND FOR GOOD REASON. WITH OUR NATIONAL COHORT AND A PROGRAM FOCUSSED ON DELIVERING A TAILORED DEVELOPMENT APPROACH FOR EACH SINGER, ‘MEET THE SCHOLARS’ NOT ONLY PROVIDES SUPPORTERS WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET – AND IMPORTANTLY HEAR – CURRENT SCHOLARS, BUT IS ALSO ONE OF THE FEW OCCASIONS THAT THE SCHOLARS PERFORM TOGETHER AS A GROUP.

This year, over 100 supporters gathered in the intimate yet grand dining room of The Australian Club in Melbourne. To commence formalities Chair of Melba Opera Trust, Robert G Logie-Smith, addressed the community sharing updates of alumni achievements and efforts underway to increase Melba Opera Trust’s presence in Sydney. Focus on building funds for the endowment remains of highest importance and whilst the endowment has grown from \$3.5 million to \$6.5 million thanks to donations, pledges and bequests, Logie-Smith stressed the importance of raising another \$3 million to achieve full sustainability for the program.

Continuing the announcements, General manager, Amy Black, spoke briefly about the collaborative projects in store for

2015, including several workshops and performances with Australian National Academy of Music (see page 9 for more information) and a partnership with Melbourne Recital Centre resulting in two concerts in the Salon later this year.

Of course the feature of the evening was the 40 minute musical program presented by this year’s Melba scholars. Artistic Advisor, Sharolyn Kimmorley AM travelled especially from Sydney to prepare and accompany the performance – an extension on the intensive work she has been undertaking with the scholars since they commenced the program in early January.

In a gesture of gratitude, second-time scholar Nikki Hill addressed the audience on behalf of her fellow scholars speaking compellingly about what being a Melba scholar has meant for her:

“The (Melba Opera) Trust has made the transformation from university life into the industry seamless. I sometimes refer to it a bit like an opera finishing school. The program allows me to continue my opera training but in the most personalized manner. I can choose which vocal teacher, vocal coaches, language classes and acting courses that I want to take part in. It has enabled me to grow considerably as an artist and I have discovered a new found confidence.”

Nikki also offered personal thanks on behalf of the scholars:

“Knowing that each and every one of you are supporting us every step of the way makes it impossible to give up when we are faced with challenges. It’s not just our parents and close



Judy Anne Stewart, Margot Lady Burrell, Fleur Gibbs & Glenn Fryer with Nikki Hill



John & Liz Wright Smith with Nicholas Tolputt



Kate & Stephen AM Shelmerdine with Shauntai Batzke

friends, but it’s the Melba family that have agreed to make an investment in our exciting futures. For this we have a responsibility. If it wasn’t for your generosity and time we would not be sitting here today. We thank you for your ongoing support and hope that you will continue to do so in whichever form possible, to enable young emerging artists like us with the best chance of creating a career in opera.’

Following the performances, the scholars were able to enjoy a relaxed reception with supporters. For many it was the first time they were introduced to those benefactors behind their named scholarship. Amy Black highlights that this is one of the most rewarding aspects of the evening.

“It’s really wonderful to watch the scholars interact with the supporters. As the night progresses you can see the confidence in the scholars growing and it’s gratifying to see the enjoyment the benefactors receive from getting to know these impressive young people. It works both ways – the scholars are similarly inspired by conversations they have, the impact of the support they are being given becomes more meaningful and they become very motivated!”

As always, our event partner, De Bortoli, was a cornerstone of the occasion. After an evening of fine wine and fine music, it is fair to say a memorable night was had by all.



MEET OUR NEW DIRECTOR:

KATE SHELMERDINE



MELBA OPERA TRUST IS THRILLED TO WELCOME KATE SHELMERDINE TO THE BOARD IN 2015.

Kate joins us with impressive and highly-relevant credentials. She is a member of The Myer Foundation and is currently Convenor of the Arts and Humanities Committee of the Sidney Myer Fund. Among other positions, she was a Board Member of the National Institute of Circus Arts (NICA) for over 10 years. Kate is already proving to be a proactive and creative contributor to the work of the Melba Board.

Kate explains what drew her to Melba Opera Trust:

“I have a personal historical connection with the Melba Conservatorium. As such, I have known about Melba Opera Trust since its inception and have always admired the work it does. I am particularly impressed by the lean fiscal way in which it is managed and I have great respect for the patrons who, in combination with the Melba Estate, are the very reason it exists.

I strongly believe in the importance

of arts training organisations and their contribution to the arts ecology of any country. These include The Australian Ballet School, NIDA, ANAM, The Fruit Flies, The Australian Youth Orchestra, NAISDA, the VCA, WAPA, PICA, as well as, of course, NICA, with which I have had the closest association. Melba Opera Trust is another of these organisations, focussing as it does on elite training for young people in arts excellence. While the art forms in which each organisation trains are very different, there are many key overlapping skills, which all emerging artists require to establish a foothold in their industry or art form after graduation.

The unique element that characterises Melba Opera Trust is its focus on these specific skills. The space between graduation and employment is, as we know, highly competitive, and can be very challenging. Over and above technical excellence and an inspiring artistic aesthetic, elements which can

be critical to success are: the capacity for independence; determination to succeed; resilience against knock-back and rejection; good, basic business skills; the ability to collaborate artistically and intellectually; flexibility; and a strong network which one uses and nurtures, for example.

All these factors are a part of the strong Mentor Program offered to the Melba scholars. Combined with the Mentor Program are the other critical elements of performance (enabling the scholars to experience different performance spaces), and funding provided through the generosity of the Trust’s benefactors. They fully appreciate the need to invest in the future of opera, and can see the potential of these gifted young singers.”

And a word on governance:

“In terms of structure, I am extremely pleased that Melba Opera Trust adopted an independent governance model, free from association with a

large organisation. While relationships with structures like universities can be immensely valuable, it is vital that small training bodies have the capacity to remain protected from external political and fiscal changes, which may undermine the integrity of their purpose.”

And finally, on her aims as a Board member:

“I would like an increased emphasis on attracting young people (peers of the scholars) to further understand, appreciate and support the work the scholars are doing. Opera is an acquired taste, but such a wonderful art form when experienced at its best. The work of educating, nurturing and enticing the next generation of opera audiences is one of the things I would like to help progress.

I LOVE Melba Opera Trust, and I am looking forward to working with all those involved with it!”

2015 SCHOLARS

OUR LADIES



Shauntai Batzke, Morgan Balfour, Nikki Hill, Zoe Drummond & Jade Moffat

JADE MOFFAT (MEZZO-SOPRANO)

**Dame Nellie Melba Scholarship and
Patrick & Vivian Gordon Award**

Jade Moffat feels ‘blessed’ to have been chosen as a scholar for a second time:

“I had some amazing experiences through Melba Opera Trust last year, highlights included working with Chuck Hudson and Yvonne Kenny AM. I made quite a lot of progress with my technique and gained confidence in performing. In my second year, I hope to continue working on dramatic interpretation, as well as getting my technique to a really solid place before I move to London in September to take up a scholarship at the Guildhall School of Music. I am very excited about that and also about having the opportunity to work again with Yvonne Kenny. As we all know, to be an accomplished opera singer, you need more than a beautiful voice – it’s definitely a difficult path to choose – so it’s wonderful and motivating to have an incredible team of people supporting you every step of the way.”

The recipient of many awards and scholarships, as well as being a seasoned performer and soloist in opera and oratorio, Jade expects to be very busy in Australia prior to her relocation to London. As well as entering various competitions, Jade will host several fundraising recitals in the coming months:

“This is my first time organising events like this, and even though it comes with its challenges, I am having a great time

exploring repertoire, and also putting my networking and negotiating skills to work!”

Before she leaves for Guildhall, Jade will be joining alumna Alexandra Flood and current scholar Daniel Carison for an Emerging Artists concert at the Australian Club on Thursday 6th August.

Jade holds a Bachelor of Music in Advanced Performance (Classical Voice) from the Queensland Conservatorium of Music.

MORGAN BALFOUR (SOPRANO)

Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship

Sydney-based, Brisbane-born Morgan Balfour has always loved singing. While her grandmother on her father’s side was a soprano and her great grandmother on her mother’s side was a mezzo-soprano, Morgan’s parents are not musicians. They have, however, encouraged her to pursue her desire to sing. She started having lessons at the age of 9, when her mother decided that if she was going to be constantly singing around the house, she may as well do it well! It appears this was a sound decision.

“I absolutely loved every minute of it. Later I went for an audition for the Young Conservatorium Program at the Queensland Conservatorium, and heard one of the music students warming up in the room that actually ended up being mine when I became a student. She was singing scales, I think, and I turned to my mum and said, “Yes, that’s what

I’m going to do”. I can’t even remember what made me say that – I just knew that’s what I wanted to do, and I haven’t really done anything else since!”

Morgan has already taken to the stage as a soloist in a number of operas and oratorios, and has toured overseas as a member of the 7 Sopranos. By now she is well aware of the challenges faced by young opera singers trying to develop professional careers, and is prepared to work hard.

“Every step yields both challenges and rewards. You have to be accomplished in many areas apart from singing, especially when there are so many sopranos out there aiming for the same roles. And I think it’s important to remember that it’s really a subjective art form. One person will love what you’re doing, while another will ask, “Why are you singing that?” And someone might say, “You’re really suited to this role”, while the next person will say, ‘You’re not what we envisage for this character’. If it’s really what you want to do, you just have to keep slogging away.”

In July, Morgan will travel to the Hawaii Performing Arts Festival, the result of a prize she won through her performance in the Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyngel Bel Canto competition last year. There she will sing the role of *Pamina* in Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*. But before that, she has a number of singing engagements for Melba Opera Trust. In May, she took part in the ‘Art Song Workshop’ in collaboration with ANAM, and at the ‘Melbourne Green’ Ball held at the Royal Exhibition Building. In June, she will perform in a recital at the Italian Cultural Institute. But perhaps the most

exciting event for Morgan, prior to her departure to Hawaii, was to sing for Emma Matthews in Master Class for the Joscelyne community in early May. As the Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholar, Morgan was thrilled to sing for Mary-Jane Joscelyne and her friends.

“I really loved singing for the Joscelyne community and the opportunity to meet them. I was invited to tea with Mary Jane recently, which was really lovely, and I think it’s amazing how she has gathered all these people together in Amelia’s memory. I am honoured to be the ‘Amelia Scholar’ and extremely grateful for the opportunity.”

Morgan holds a Bachelor of Music in Advanced Performance (Classical Voice) from the Queensland Conservatorium of Music.

NIKKI HILL (SOPRANO)

**Margaret Schofield Opera Scholarship
and Ruskin Opera Award**

Queensland born, Sydney-based soprano Nikki Hill is in her second year as a Melba scholar. She finds she can now articulate well to the many people who ask exactly what it is that Melba Opera Trust provides for her and other young opera singers. For Nikki, being part of the ‘Melba family’ support network has been particularly meaningful, as her own family, while very supportive of her endeavours, is more knowledgeable about specific sports than opera:

“I value the personal support I receive from Melba Opera Trust very highly. One unique example of this is that I grew up riding horses, but due to my opera commitments, I don’t go home often. Last year, John and Elizabeth Wright-Smith, very generous supporters of the Trust, insisted that I visit their farm in the Yarra Valley to go horse riding! This was very special for me.”

As for all scholars, Melba performances form a vital part of Nikki’s development. The opportunity to sing at Coombe Cottage for Melba patron Jenny Sutherland and her husband David’s 50th wedding anniversary in March was a highlight of Nikki’s Melba engagements so far this year. She recently enjoyed singing at a private birthday celebration for Melba Board member and supporter Roz Ruskin at a restaurant in North Fitzroy. As well she is excited to take part in the Melbourne Recital Centre’s ‘Local Heroes’ series in the Salon later this year.

Nikki has also appreciated the personalised training program her Melba involvement has allowed her to design, and has particularly valued the opportunities to improve her language skills and develop important networks:

“I recently spent time studying Italian in Montepulciano in Tuscany, and now that I have a grasp on that language, I’m moving on to German. While I was overseas, I was able to spend time in London working with the amazing Yvonne Kenny, whom I’d met through the Trust six months prior. I also met up with Lauren Fagan and Emily Edmonds, previous Melba scholars who’ve made it into the Jette Parker Young Artists Program at Covent Garden. It’s quite special to think that you will find people connected to the Trust pretty much anywhere in the world. And to top it all off, when I fill out the ‘Occupation’ window of my international arrivals card now, I feel I can write ‘Opera Singer’. Now that’s quite something!”

Nikki holds a Bachelor of Music from the Queensland Conservatorium of Music.

SHAUNTAI BATZKE (SOPRANO)

**Harold Blair Opera Scholarship and
Mel & Nina Waters Scholarship**

Returning scholar, soprano Shauntai Batzke, felt she learned and achieved a lot during her first year with Melba Opera Trust:

“During 2014, my confidence in myself as an opera singer grew. My technique improved and I developed on many levels. I also built stronger connections with some of the best artists in the industry. I took every opportunity that was available and in doing so, learned more about the capabilities of the voice I was blessed with. I will continue to pursue excellence, with the ultimate aim of touching the lives of people both in Australia and overseas.”

Shauntai has a big year planned for her second year as a Melba scholar. As well as her Melba commitments, she is a developing artist with Short Black Opera Company, Australia’s first and only Indigenous Opera Company, and maintains her position as an established Gospel singer-songwriter.

No stranger to the stage, Shauntai recently performed alongside her colleague, bass-baritone Daniel Carison, in a private Melba Artists recital at The Australian Club. The two were fellow students at Melbourne University, and had always hoped for an opportunity to sing together, so this was an enjoyable experience for both on a number of levels.

2015 is also a year of auditions for Shauntai, as she works to establish her singing career further:

"I've started auditioning for opera companies in Melbourne and summer schools here and overseas. I'm excited about beginning to launch myself into the wide world of opera. With the incredible support of Melba, my teacher Liane Keegan, Short Black Opera, friends and family, I am confident that by taking every opportunity and making steady steps towards my ultimate goal, I will soon see some of my dreams to sing in opera, concert halls and classical musicals come to fruition."

Shauntai holds a Bachelor of Music from the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music at the University of Melbourne.

ZOE DRUMMOND (SOPRANO)

RJ Hamer Opera Scholarship

Zoe Drummond has already received many awards and has performed as a soloist on numerous occasions, including having been selected during her final year to represent the Sydney Conservatorium at the inaugural Estivo Chamber Music Festival in Verona, Italy. Here she performed in vocal recitals and studied with some of the world's most prestigious vocal teachers.

Although Zoe is the first in her family to become a professional musician, she comes from a 'musically-enthusiastic, incredibly supportive and interested' family. Singing has always been a part of her life:

"As a toddler I would dress up as Mary Poppins, singing directions at my cupboards to tidy themselves, or as Snow White serenading the birds while waiting for them to land on my finger. My mother tells a story of me as a pre-schooler, when I was apparently captivated by a television commercial for 'The 3 Chinese Tenors' regional tour, and I begged my parents to take me. No doubt she thought I was quite a peculiar child!"

Zoe is currently enjoying learning new repertoire for opera recitals in May to be given by *Voci Stupende*, a group of singers who studied at the Sydney Conservatorium. In June, she will sing at the 140th centenary of Her Majesty's Theatre in Ballarat, an opportunity she considers to be quite an honour, as "Dame Nellie herself performed numerous recitals in this glorious theatre". And in July she will make a quick trip to China with the 7 Sopranos.

As a Melba scholar, Zoe also has many Melba Artists and other Trust-related performances on the horizon, opportunities she refers to as "another great aspect of the perfectly-designed program that allows the scholar to embark on personalised training of the highest quality, as well as providing workshops, master classes, and mentoring".

Zoe's aims for 2015 include consolidating and polishing her classical singing skills, with languages, vocal technique and repertoire development as priorities:

"To reach and sustain a high standard, a singer must have regular lessons, coaching and training. With the support of Melba Opera Trust programs, I have the resources, time, energy and drive to really fine-tune my singing."

Zoe holds a Bachelor of Music in Performance (Voice) with First Class Honours from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.



COVENT GARDEN

CALLS FOR EMILY EDMONDS

MEZZO-SOPRANO EMILY EDMONDS, PAST RECIPIENT OF THE DAME NELLIE MELBA OPERA SCHOLARSHIP AND THE PATRICK AND VIVIAN GORDON AWARD, IS THE FOURTH MEMBER OF MELBA OPERA TRUST'S ALUMNI TO JOIN THE ROYAL OPERA'S JETTE PARKER YOUNG ARTISTS PROGRAMME.

The young artists selected for this program are employed as salaried members of the Royal Opera for a two-year period that allows them to be 'immersed in the life of the Royal Opera House' and includes extensive daily coaching in languages, stagecraft and vocal techniques as well as performance opportunities.

While abroad in 2014, Melba Opera Trust General Manager Amy Black met with David Gowland, Artistic Director at Covent Garden, and she is proud of the relationship that Melba Opera Trust is building with the programme.

"It was clear from speaking with David that the Jette Parker programme is a Young Artist program in the truest sense. It has a philosophy of looking after its artists, actively crafting their development and offering appropriate roles. It is exactly the calibre of program that we are hoping to prepare our scholars for and I am absolutely delighted for Emily."

In September Emily will join fellow Melba alumni – soprano Lauren Fagan, tenor Samuel Sakker and baritone Samuel Johnson – at the Royal Opera House with other successful applicants, Russian soprano Vlada Borovko, Irish soprano Jennifer Davis, Korean tenor David Junghoon Kim, British bass David Shipley and British stage director Richard Gerard Jones. These artists were selected from a field of 370 applicants from 59 countries through a rigorous audition process.

Not surprisingly, Emily is very excited about her acceptance into this programme at the forefront of young artists' development:

"I will be able to learn from some of the best, be a part of an incredible international opera company, and work hard to develop my identity as a professional musician. What the programme offers with regard to coaching, language tuition, stagecraft and movement training is exceptional, and I am thrilled to have such an opportunity."

Emily's credentials to date stand her in good stead for her forthcoming involvement in this programme. She is a First Class Honours graduate in Vocal Performance from the Sydney Conservatorium and has an impressive list of roles to her name. Emily has also completed a Young Artists Programme with Pacific Opera Company, and received an Australia Council for the Arts ArtStart grant allowing her to continue her studies abroad in 2014. This was "a fantastic year of valuable input, learning, and refining on a broad scale".

With all that lies ahead, Emily has given some thought to the biggest challenges facing young singers at the moment:

"IT'S VERY IMPORTANT THAT WE ARE ABLE TO FEEL AT HOME ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD, BECAUSE SO OFTEN WE MUST LIVE AND WORK AWAY FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS. FOR THIS REASON, I THINK THAT THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG SINGERS ARE STRIVING FOR BALANCE, FINDING A STRONG SENSE OF SELF, AND BEING ABLE TO BUILD COMMUNITIES WHEREVER WE FIND OURSELVES."



Emily Edmonds as a Melba scholar working with Teddy Tahu-Rhodes, 2014

Emily is already working on building her London connections, performing recently with fellow Melba alumna Panayiota Kalatzis on behalf of the Tait Foundation for 'Shakespeare in the Salon'.

Before relocating to London, Emily is busy continuing her development and preparing roles. You can see Emily perform the role of *Asteria* in Pinchgut's production of *Bajazet* in Sydney in July, and Emily will also be appearing on behalf of Melba Opera Trust at a Sydney Soiree in early August.

We congratulate Emily Edmonds and look forward to keeping readers informed of her latest developments.

mantra
st kilda road

MANTRA FOR MELBA...

WE ARE THRILLED THAT MANTRA ST KILDA ROAD HAS AGAIN AGREED TO COME ON BOARD WITH MELBA OPERA TRUST IN 2015 AS OUR ACCOMMODATION PARTNER.

Melba Opera Trust Managing Director, Peter Garnick notes Mantra's exemplary facilities and that they ensure "our travelling singers are in the best shape to reap the full benefits of their intensive Melbourne training activities".

To enjoy Mantra's hospitality first hand, don't forget to access our exclusive 'Melba supporter' rate when booking your accommodation. Simply enter 'Melba' as the promotion code, call them on (03) 9525 0400 or email stkilda.res@mantra.com.au.

A LITTLE LEGACY: GOES A LONG WAY

MELBA’S WILL – THE LEGACY OF A LIFETIME



THROUGH HER BEQUEST IN 1931, DAME NELLIE MELBA ENSURED THAT HER SUPPORT FOR AUSTRALIA’S EMERGING OPERATIC TALENTS WOULD FOREVER BE PRESERVED FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS OF ASPIRING SINGERS.

Nearly a century later the power of Melba’s foresight lives on in the music-making of our Melba scholars – a quintessential example of the lasting impact of a legacy gift.

If you would like to learn more about how to make a bequest to Melba Opera Trust, we would love to hear from you and help you to create a meaningful legacy gift. Our *Melba’s Will* bequest information also includes possible legal wording for your convenience.

Examples for how you might consider directing your bequest include:

- Establishing a fully endowed, named scholarship
- A general endowment contribution to be used where most needed
- Program funding (Mentor, Performance, Indigenous, Repetiteur) and
- Contributions toward existing scholarships

For those supporters who would like to enjoy the fruits of their commitment, we hope you will notify us of your decision so we can invite you to join us for special *Melba’s Will* occasions.

For more information on bequests contact Peter Garnick on 03 9867 4833 or pgarnick@melbaoperatrust.com.au

IN MELBA’S FOOTSTEPS...



Jade Moffat performing at Meet the Scholars



Emily Edmonds at Australian Opera Awards Committee performance

IN 1931 WHEN MELBA BEQUEATHED HER SCHOLARSHIP TO SUPPORT YOUNG AUSTRALIAN SINGERS “IN THE HOPE THAT ANOTHER MELBA MAY ARISE”, COULD SHE HAVE IMAGINED THAT 84 YEARS LATER HER IMPACT RESOUNDS STRONGER THAN EVER?

Indeed it’s been a journey of success for the Dame Nellie Melba Scholarship. The last three recipients of this historically significant and prestigious scholarship are following directly in our prima donna’s own footsteps – to further their development in her ‘operatic home’ – London!

The significance of Melba’s continuing influence is not lost on recipients Jade Moffat (2014-2015), Emily Edmonds (2013) and Lauren Fagan (2011-2012).

In September this year, current scholar, Jade Moffat, will take up a full scholarship at the Guildhall School of Music Opera Course in London, and looks forward to studying further with Australian soprano and Melba Mentor, Yvonne Kenny AM.

Emily Edmonds will re-locate to London later in 2015 to take up a place in the Jette Parker Young Artists Programme at Covent Garden, the fourth Melba scholar to do so:

“It is extraordinary to think of all the brilliant people who have performed on the stage at the Royal Opera House, including Dame Nellie Melba herself! The thought of singing in the same place as Melba and so many great Australian singers is really awe-inspiring.”

Lauren is in her first year in the Jette Parker Young Artists Programme, and is already making her mark:

“I have been given incredible opportunities to jump in for the main stars at the last moment. I played

Giannetta in Donizetti’s *L’elisir d’amore* with only a few hours’ notice. I’ve also sung two shows as *Oskar* in Verdi’s *Un ballo in maschera*, a major role opposite Joseph Calleja and Dmitri Hvorostovsky. It’s incredible to have been trusted to go on the stage of the Royal Opera House after only three months on the programme, and I am sure this is due in part to the experience I gained through the programs.

I’m now really looking forward to singing the *Leila/Zurga* duet from Bizet’s *The Pearl Fishers* with fellow Melba alumnus Samuel Johnson in our end of year showcase recital. This will be on the main stage with orchestra and will be particularly special, as my principle mentor from Australia, Melba Trust Artistic Advisor Sharolyn Kimmorley AM, will be there to watch!

I won’t ever lose the special feeling I get when I cross behind the stage of the Opera House, let alone stand on it to sing”.

So how is it these young singers have been able to replicate Melba’s path so closely? Melba expert and author of *I am Melba*, Ann Blainey, wonders whether it could be the similarity between Mathilde Marchesi’s ‘finishing school’ for prima donna’s in Paris which Melba attended in 1887, and the Melba Opera Trust’s own 21st century-version of such a program?

Like Melba Opera Trust, the aim at École Marchesi was to give a brilliant finish to an already well-trained voice.

When singers left Madame Marchesi’s care, they could hold their own in any opera house in Europe and in the top ranks of European society. They had opportunities to perform, as well as communal and individual lessons, opera and music history, acting, and mime classes. Deportment classes were also important, as it was there that students learned how to sit, walk and eat elegantly, as well as how to receive guests and how to keep their heads in any situation.

Melba’s art certainly developed greatly in the time she spent at École Marchesi. Towards the end of her time there, she made her debut at the renowned Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels in October 1887 as *Gilda* in Verdi’s *Rigoletto*. And it was only after her time with Marchesi that Melba could establish herself as the leading lyric soprano at Covent Garden after 1888.

Perhaps just as Melba benefited from her comprehensive period of study at École Marchesi, so too have Jade, Emily and Lauren over their tenure with Melba Opera Trust. Fortunately for them, and thanks to the pioneering efforts of Dame Nellie, they didn’t have to travel all the way to Paris for their ‘finishing touches’!

The Melba is grateful to Ann Blainey for her input into this article.



HISTORY REPEATING FOR SHAUNTAI BATZKE...



YET ANOTHER LEGACY BEING CHAMPIONED BY CURRENT SCHOLARS IS THAT OF AUSTRALIA'S FIRST INDIGENOUS OPERA SINGER, TENOR HAROLD BLAIR (1924-1976). AS WELL AS BEING A LEADING OPERATIC VOICE IN AUSTRALIA IN THE '60S, HAROLD WAS ALSO AN ALUMNUS OF THE ALBERT STREET (LATER MELBA) CONSERVATORIUM AND TAUGHT AT THE INSTITUTION.

Four years ago, Melba Opera Trust launched the Harold Blair Opera Scholarship, established in Harold's honour and to ensure that promising young Australian Indigenous singers have the opportunities they need to excel. Current recipient, Shauntai Batzke, has been the recipient of this support for the last two years and is not only strongly representing Harold's memory, but like her fellow Melba colleagues, is now following directly in his footsteps!

Following his musical education at the Conservatorium, Harold's talent was recognised by visiting American baritone, Todd Duncan. Todd was so taken with Harold that he invited him to travel to America to continue his operatic studies. Harold embraced this opportunity and it was the beginning of an operatic career that would follow Harold back to Australia.

Inspired by this and a hunger to continue her own operatic development abroad, Shauntai Batzke applied for a position in the *Cantos de las Americas - A Workshop for Aspiring Artists in the Vocal Arts*.

We are proud to report that Shauntai is one of 16 to have been accepted. In July, Shauntai will travel to New York to participate in this three week summer program, working intensively with vocal and coaching staff from the Metropolitan Opera.

Whilst this may not necessarily be history repeating in the true sense, we know that thanks to her work with Melba Opera Trust and Short Black Opera, Shauntai is ready to embark on this journey and will no doubt return to Australia as enriched with knowledge as Harold was.

Our sincere thanks to supporters of the Harold Blair Opera Scholarship for making sure the support – and consequently this opportunity – has been made available to Shauntai.

To support the Harold Blair Opera Scholarship with a tax-deductible donation, please call: 03 9867 4833
Email: info@melbaoperatrust.com.au
or visit www.melbaoperatrust.com.au



Lauren Fagan & Samuel Sakker at Royal Opera House (Image courtesy of Catherine Ashmore)

A PIECE OF MELBA'S HISTORY...

RECENTLY, ADMIRERS OF OUR FIRST PRIMA DONNA WERE GIVEN THE RARE OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE HOME THEIR OWN LITTLE 'PIECE OF MELBA' WITH SOTHEBY'S AUCTIONING A SMALL SELECTION OF HER PERSONAL TREASURES.

In a show of continuing enthusiasm for Melba's great legacy, auction results far surpassed initial expectation, reporting a total of \$1.99 million, nearly four times the pre-auction estimate values of the 162 items.

The auction was held at the Grand Hyatt Melbourne following a 10-day exhibition in Sydney and Melbourne at Sotheby's Australia galleries. A reported 1,000 visitors viewed Asian, Australian and European art, decorative arts, jewels and objects of vertu with the historic sale attracting 400 registered bidders from 'all corners of the globe'.

Sotheby's

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from her very earliest

2015 SCHOLARS

OUR GENTLEMEN



Nicholas Tolputt, Daniel Carison & Jeremy Kleeman

JEREMY KLEEMAN (BASS-BARITONE)

Joseph Sambrook Opera Scholarship

In his second year as Melba Opera Trust's Joseph Sambrook Opera Scholarship holder, Jeremy is certainly establishing himself on the operatic stage. He performs regularly for Victorian Opera and other companies, as an oratorio soloist, and in recital. Commitments for Victorian Opera during the remainder of 2015 include singing in the ensemble for Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler's *Sweeney Todd*, and taking the role of *Lord Valton* in Bellini's *I puritani*.

Jeremy recently appeared in the production of Handel's rarely-performed opera *Faramondo* in the Brisbane Baroque festival, an obviously memorable experience that he says fills him with confidence for his forthcoming Victorian Opera commitments:

"Performing in *Faramondo* in Brisbane has been one of the highlights of my career so far. It has also been one of the most challenging experiences. I was offered the role just 12 days before rehearsals were due to commence. I had to fit the five-week commitment into my schedule, which meant I had to cancel some performances and arrange to fly down to Melbourne on several occasions for others. Secondly, I had to actually learn the role: it's no *Wotan*, but in early rehearsals when the Italian recitative was only just sticking, we would block entire scenes in one go, run them from memory, and then I'd be given notes from the director

suggesting that my character was completely wrong! I thank him for it now though. There is a reason Paul Curran is working at the top opera houses in the world. He was very tough on me, but it took my performance to a completely new level. The cast was made up predominantly of people in their 30s who are at the top of their craft, so I was really happy just to be fitting in. The show was received extremely well and I've had some great mentions in reviews. It's been an experience that will set the tone for my career."

Languages form a major focus of Jeremy's development this year, with a particular emphasis on German, and he is working with some new coaches and teachers. In amongst this work and his operatic performances, he gave a wonderful solo recital in March with Associate Repetiteur Stefan Cassomenos in the home of his supporters Joe Sambrook and Mary-Jane Gething.

"I am very grateful to receive support through the Joseph Sambrook Opera Scholarship for the second year. I think that not only does Melba Opera Trust support young artists, but the funds are also being invested back into the Australian opera industry because of the many wonderful mentors and teachers engaged by both the Trust and by the scholarship recipients."

Jeremy holds a Bachelor of Music from the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music (MCM) at the University of Melbourne and a Master of Music (Opera Performance) through the MCM/Victorian Opera collaboration.

NICHOLAS TOLPUTT (COUNTER-TENOR)

John and Elizabeth Wright-Smith Scholarship

Nicholas Tolputt is the first counter-tenor to receive support from Melba Opera Trust. A former baritone, Nicholas made the switch only a month before he moved to Melbourne from Tasmania to take up a place at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music.

"DURING A LESSON WITH MY WONDERFUL SINGING TEACHER BENJAMIN MARTIN, I STUMBLED ACROSS THE OPTION OF SINGING AS A COUNTER-TENOR WHILE DOING SCALES ONE DAY. I JUST KEPT SINGING HIGHER AND HIGHER UNTIL I BROKE INTO MY FALSETTO, AND I FOUND THAT THE SOUND I COULD MAKE THERE WAS ALL RIGHT! SO I STARTED AT THE MCM AS A COUNTER-TENOR AND HAVEN'T LOOKED BACK."

While Nicholas grew up in a house filled with music, it was not classical music:

"I'm not certain what drew me to classical music, but my earliest memories are of lying on the bed listening to ABC Classic FM. Nowadays I listen to pretty much nothing else, other than perhaps a touch of jazz every now and then."

In 2013, Nicholas gave a recital back in his home town of Launceston to raise funds to travel to the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis in Switzerland to study with renowned counter-tenor Andreas Scholl. Further travel is on the horizon, as is another solo fund-raising concert in Tasmania, since he has been awarded the Glover Music Trust Scholarship, which he intends to use to help fund higher education in Europe.

In 2014 Nicholas appeared in the Hobart Baroque festival in a solo recital, and as understudy for the role of *Medoro* in Handel's opera *Orlando*. He has recently sung a very successful solo recital as part of the 2015 Brisbane Baroque festival.

"Singing in an international baroque festival in my own country is something I feel very lucky to have had the opportunity to do. Being surrounded by such a talented and passionate group of musicians all dedicated to performing the beautiful music of some of my favourite composers created an environment that was both inspiring and a bit nerve-wracking! Thankfully, the training and study made possible through the support of Melba Opera Trust helped prepare me for these challenges."

In one of the more unique performance opportunities to date, Nicholas was invited to perform at a private event to celebrate John Wright-Smith's birthday. As the current recipient of the John and Elizabeth Wright-Smith Scholarship, Nicholas found this experience most enjoyable, made possible through our Melba Artists program.

It was a privilege to be invited to John and Liz's beautiful property to perform for them. It is always wonderful to sing for such an appreciative and enthusiastic audience and it felt very special to be able to help celebrate John's birthday!"

Nicholas is delighted with his experience of the Trust's program to date:

"The opportunities made available are enabling me to develop as an artist in all areas of the operatic field, and are providing invaluable support for my future career. My focuses and highlights include intensive German language sessions, repertoire and historically-informed performance coaching, and the chance to study with national and international performing artists at the top of their field. I plan to make the most of my time as a Melba scholar to gain a deeper knowledge of my own voice."

Nicholas holds a Bachelor of Music from the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music at the University of Melbourne.

DANIEL CARISON (BASS-BARITONE)

Opera Society Vocal Scholarship and Beleura-Tallis Opera Scholarship

As a musician and actor, Daniel Carison has performed as soloist and ensemble member in opera, as well as in operetta, recitals, musicals and straight dramas. He has won awards for both his opera-singing and acting. With a father and grandfather who were actors and musicians, the stage has long played an important role in Daniel's life:

"As I grew up, my father performed in musical theatre, and did a lot of stage work. I'd often sit with him while he was rehearsing and go through his lines with him. He obviously loved it, though he didn't pursue it as a career, because his parents didn't endorse the idea of his getting into what seemed a volatile industry. But I found his passion for singing and acting quite contagious – it inspired me. Initially I wasn't sure what form my desire to perform would take, and at one time I was leaning towards studying straight acting at NIDA or WAPA, but eventually I decided to study music at Melbourne University."

Both immensely supportive and encouraging, Daniel is aware of the invaluable role his parents play in his journey:

"As a performer, you're always questioning whether you're good enough. The successes are one thing, but you take a lot of hits too – it's a bit of a blood sport! Therefore it's very important to have the family's support. If I didn't have that, I think I would find it a lot harder".

In this 'tricky business', Daniel is finding the Mentor Program crucial in developing skills alongside performance and stagecraft.

"THE MENTOR PROGRAM IS FACILITATING THE SKILLS NEEDED TO SURVIVE IN THIS INDUSTRY. THE MORE I TAKE PART, THE MORE I'M SOLD ON IT, BECAUSE WHILE YOU MIGHT BE STRONG IN SOME AREAS, YOU CAN LET YOURSELF DOWN IN OTHERS. IT'S ALSO REALLY BENEFICIAL TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE CONNECTIONS WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE BOTH WONDERFUL ARTISTS AND PASSIONATE ABOUT THE INDUSTRY. AND AS A SINGER IN MY EARLY 20S, I FIND THE NECESSARY MATERIALS AND RESOURCES CAN BE EXPENSIVE—PAYING FOR REGULAR SINGING LESSONS OUT OF MY OWN POCKET WOULD BE DIFFICULT."

Apart from his involvement with the Mentor Program, 2015 is a busy performing year for Daniel. In May he will take the role of the *Pirate King* for Gilbert & Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance* for the Savoy Opera Company, as well as singing in the ensemble for Opera Australia's production of Verdi's *Don Carlos*. In July he will be part of Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler's *Sweeney Todd* for Victorian Opera. In amongst this, Daniel will sing in exclusive events for Melba Artists; he has already performed in honour of the supporters behind his scholarship. In March, Daniel performed for the Opera Society at a luncheon at Coombe – The Melba Estate and, more recently, for the Tallis Foundation in 'Twilight in the Garden' at Beleura. "

Performing in Melba Artists concerts is training me to be really adaptable, as we sing a variety of repertoire, which means it's necessary to hone in on a technique that makes it possible to switch quickly from one style to another – you have to know your own voice incredibly well. But if you're lucky enough to be singing professionally and regularly in the industry, your work will demand that of you."

Daniel holds a Bachelor of Music from the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music at the University of Melbourne.





Stefan Cassomenos
(credit Belinda Strodder)

STEFAN CASSOMENOS

Associate Repetiteur

Stefan is 'hugely enjoying' his second year as Associate Repetiteur with Melba Opera Trust. Thanks to funding from the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, Stefan continues to benefit from intensive training in skills essential to any repetiteur. "It has given me the opportunity to continue my Italian and German language study, as well as extending my knowledge of the opera repertoire with various mentors."

In the first months of 2015, Stefan has performed on several occasions with Melba scholars. In particular, he was delighted to join with Melba colleague bass-baritone Jeremy Kleeman in a private soiree for patrons Joe Sambrook and Mary-Jane Gething in March. He also had "great fun playing a terrific program" at recent Melba Opera Trust performance as part of the Bayside 'Resonance' Series.

Not often idle, Stefan will continue coaching with Melba's own Sharolyn Kimmorley AM and will also have the opportunity to be coached by visiting repetiteurs, Jennifer Marten-Smith and Semyon Rozin.

A key aspect of the Associate Repetiteur scholarship charges Stefan with the responsibility of not only accompanying scholars, but also musically preparing them. Mentoring by Sharolyn is essential to mastering this process and the benefit of a second year cannot be understated:

"Building a knowledge of the operatic repertoire is an exhaustive process that will take many years. Having the opportunity to be mentored by experienced vocal coaches at this stage of the journey will be of enormous value to Stefan. He is truly fortunate to be able to continue to do this with support from Melba Opera Trust."

In addition to his activities with Melba Opera Trust, Stefan remains busy with his contemporary chamber ensemble PLEXUS. With fellow members Monica Curro (violin) and Philip Arkinstall (clarinet), Stefan played a concert in late May at Deakin Edge, Federation Square; the launch of their new three-concert series PLEXUS SQUARED. Earlier in the year, he played solo recitals in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Perth, as well as in Switzerland, Germany and Malta.

He is now looking forward to staying in Australia and working with the 'wonderfully talented singers of Melba Opera Trust' until his next overseas tour in October.

Stefan holds a Bachelor of Music (Performance) from the University of Melbourne, and is a graduate of Australian National Academy of Music. He studied on scholarship at both institutions.



IN MASTER CLASS, WITH DARIA MASIERO

Mogran Balfour & Daria Masiero

THE MENTOR PROGRAM FOR 2015 IS WELL UNDERWAY, WITH THREE OF THE SEVEN BLOCKS COMPLETED ALREADY. THE FIRST MASTER CLASS OF THE YEAR FOCUSED EXCLUSIVELY ON ITALIAN REPERTOIRE AND WAS DELIVERED BY INTERNATIONALLY-ACCLAIMED ITALIAN SOPRANO, DARIA MASIERO.

Thanks to the continued support of Lady Southey AC, a small number of guests were invited to Cranlana to observe Daria working with the scholars.

Daria worked with our singers last year and, according to Melba Opera Trust Program Coordinator, Bruce Raggatt, was much loved on both occasions:

"Daria's wonderfully engaging personality and passion for singing in Italian made her a huge hit and an obvious candidate to present a master class in 2015 on Italian

language repertoire. She was certainly able to correct any pronunciation anomalies, and to illustrate how good pronunciation helps one to sing better technically, but she also conveyed to the singers her love for her native language. It is almost impossible to overstate Daria's warmth and the joy she has in working with young singers. And for their part, they lapped it up with understandable keenness."

Daria praised the Mentor Program claiming that in Italy there "is nothing to compare with this program and the support it offers to developing singers."

Over a private industry lunch with the scholars, Daria emphasized the importance of travel in order for scholars to develop an international understanding of the opera world. After all, as opera singers, they are world employees. Ms Masiero is keen to continue assisting and advising Melba scholars through her Melba Opera Trust involvement.

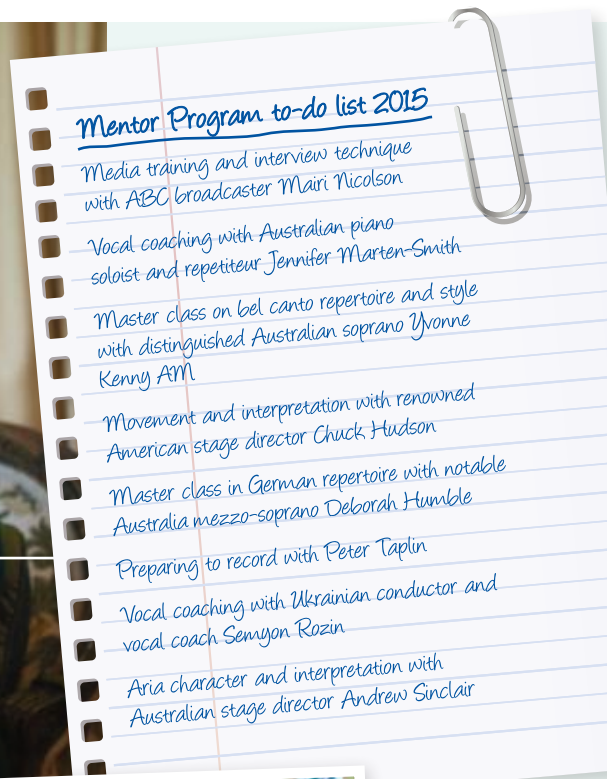
For first-time Melba Opera Trust scholar, soprano Zoe Drummond, the experience was 'really wonderful':

"Daria is so warm and friendly, and

such a master of her craft. I really loved performing 'Quando m'en vo' from Puccini's *La bohème* for her, as she had such a clear idea of how the music and character should be communicated. I particularly found her imagery for breathing very beneficial. I felt proud to be complimented on my Italian too! And then a few weeks ago, I was lucky enough to see Daria perform the role of *Aida* in a dress rehearsal for 'Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour'. It was fascinating to watch her put her technique into practice."

There is still much for our singers to look forward to in the four Mentor Program blocks yet to come. There are some familiar faces, but also some new industry experts we welcome to our Faculty of Mentors.

Melba Opera Trust thanks Opus 40 Charitable Fund and Creative Partnerships Australia for their support of the Mentor Program.



Daniel, Morgan, Jeremy, Zoe & Jade with Daria Masiero

LEARNING THE ART OF ENSEMBLE

In May, our scholars were involved for the first time in an 'Art Song Workshop': a collaboration with Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM) musicians.

While Melba Opera Trust fosters the development of Australia's most promising opera singers, ANAM, of course, trains Australia's top instrumentalists and pianists – a match made in heaven, we thought! Melba Opera Trust Program Coordinator Bruce Raggatt, who developed the project in conjunction with General Manager, Amy Black, describes the workshop and the intentions behind it:

"Born of a desire to create a collaborative partnership with ANAM, it was decided that an ideal way to bring artists from both organisations together was to perform art song. Each of our participating singers was paired with a pianist from ANAM, and given two art songs to prepare. Art song was chosen in preference to opera arias because the piano parts are written specifically for that instrument, rather than being piano reductions of an operatic score.

It was also important that Melba Opera Trust Artistic Advisor Sharolyn Kimmorley AM was free to choose repertoire that would suit both singer and pianist, making creative demands on both equally."

With a philosophy of training singers to be self sufficient, an important objective of this workshop was also to instil best practice 'ensemble' preparation for the singers and to encourage personal responsibility for both the preparation AND performance process:

"The participants were encouraged to prepare their pieces together and make their own rehearsal arrangements. They then presented their art songs, first in a guided rehearsal with Sharolyn, and then in front of their peers in a master class format with Sharolyn and Australian soprano Merlyn Quaife AM. Performers were also quizzed on how they approached the collaboration, what they learnt from it and were given feedback on how

it could be approached differently in the future. The focus of this exercise was not so much on performance, but on the development of the artistic relationship between singer and pianist. We wanted them to have the chance to create a partnership and to work through the challenges, such as assisting the pianist to understand text in a foreign language, negotiating phrasing and tempo, making decisions regarding who takes the lead at different moments, the singers' need to breathe, and so on. Of course the aim was also to have them experience the joy from collaborating in this way."

Sharolyn felt it was a unique opportunity for Melba scholars to work with 'outstanding pianists from ANAM':

"Singers are very often told what to do by teachers, coaches, conductors and directors, and this project provided the opportunity for them to enjoy a real collaborative relationship with fellow musicians. There is a lifetime of repertoire to explore and I believe it is

essential for our young singers to develop this love of words and music alongside their operatic repertoire. Some of my own happiest musical memories are of recitals I have played with singers such as Håkan Hagegård, Sir Thomas Allen and Bryn Terfel, and I hope our young musicians are as fortunate as I have been."

Everyone involved found the exercise enlightening, challenging, and ultimately very rewarding. The collaboration with ANAM continued in May with a Chamber Music concert presented by a selection of Melba Opera Trust and ANAM scholars at the Australian Club. Other projects on the horizon include an orchestral workshop, providing our singers with a chance to work intensively with conductor and orchestra, whilst providing the orchestra an opportunity to better understand and support a vocalist.



Sharolyn Kimmorley AM, Jade Moffat, Morgan Balfour & Nicholas Tolputt



SUPPORTING THE JOURNEY – A PERSONAL APPROACH

ON SEVERAL RECENT OCCASIONS SCHOLARS HAVE ENTERTAINED BENEFACTORS AT AN ARRAY OF UNIQUE AND INTIMATE OCCASIONS. READ HOW OUR DONORS ARE BRINGING OPERA INTO THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES AND ENJOYING THE FRUITS OF THEIR SUPPORT IN VERY PERSONAL WAYS...

A FEW OF ROZ'S FAVOURITE THINGS

ENTERTAINING, ITALIAN FOOD AND MELBA OPERA TRUST ARE THREE OF MELBA BOARD MEMBER AND SUPPORTER ROZ RUSKIN'S FAVOURTIE THINGS.

Since becoming involved with Melba and having fallen in love with opera, Roz was delighted to bring her favourite things together for a special birthday celebration in May.

Second-year recipient of the Ruskin Opera Award, Nikki Hill, together with bass-baritone Daniel Carison and Stefan Cassomenos serenaded Roz and her guests in the intimate setting of Pinotta restaurant in North Fitzroy.

Roz and her husband Jeremy continue to be very proud of Nikki and her 'amazing talent' and enjoy sharing Nikki's journey with their friends.

Nikki felt especially fortunate to perform in the inviting surrounds of the stylish restaurant:



Roz Zalewski & Jeremy Ruskin QC with Nikki Hill

"Like Roz's 2014 event, 'Opera in the Pub' at the Star Hotel in North Fitzroy, this was a unique and rewarding experience."

For Roz, this birthday celebration was to reflect her varied interests and tastes:

"Getting together with family and friends over fine wine and good food is vital to my well-being, and I love planning and organising events. Music and song add a joyful and uplifting dimension to the pleasure I – and I trust my guests – get from sharing these things in elegant surroundings. Pinotta is one of my favourite eateries at present, and we go there often. For me, this was the perfect way to mark my birthday."

A very warm Happy Birthday to Roz from the Melba family!

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH EMMA MATTHEWS

WE ARE REGULARLY ASKED BY OUR SUPPORTERS "WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE AN OPERA SINGER?"

The answer invariably includes patience, hard work and attention to detail, not to mention musicality and an outstanding voice! But the best way to really understand the level of preparation required is to see it in action.

In May, supporters of the Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship were given the 'behind the scenes' opportunity to observe current 'Amelia' recipient, Morgan Balfour and fellow Melba scholars working hard in a master class with internationally acclaimed soprano, Emma Matthews.

For many guests this was not only their first master class experience, but also the first opportunity to meet Morgan, the current 'Amelia' scholar. Morgan, in turn, felt especially

privileged to take part, "welcoming the opportunity to meet the Joscelyne community", and to sing for her absolute idol', Emma Matthews. Morgan was joined by fellow scholars bass-baritone Jeremy Kleeman and sopranos Shauntai Batzke and Nikki Hill.

Prior to the event, Melba Opera Trust Founding Patron Mary-Jane Joscelyne was greatly looking forward to it:

"I had never attended a master class given by Emma Matthews, and was as excited as the scholars were! Past scholars have often talked about how they enjoyed Emma's insight, warmth and laughter, which was again shown at this event."

Blending fine music with fine art has always been a recipe for success.



Mary-Jane Joscelyne, Emma Matthews & Morgan Balfour

Just as Dame Nellie Melba was an exceptional Australian opera singer, so Ellis Rowan has long been recognised as a wonderful botanical illustrator. The beautiful Ellis Rowan Room at The Australian Club thus provided an appropriate setting for the occasion. Mary-Jane commented on her personal connection and affection for the venue: "The singers are so fortunate to be able to sing in so many different venues, but this room would have to be a highlight. Early on, my husband Bill took me to dinner there so it holds very special memories for me."

Following the class, supporters, scholars and masters alike all enjoyed afternoon tea to 'de-brief' the unique learning experience.

OPERA IN THE HOME... WARWICK AND PAULETTE BISLEY

In May, two of our scholars, Jeremy Kleeman and Zoe Drummond, were invited into the home of Founding Patrons, Warwick and Paulette Bisley, to perform for an intimate group of the Bisley's family and friends.

Warwick and Paulette have been strong supporters of Melba Opera Trust since our inception in 2008 and this was a chance for us to say 'thank you' in the way we know best!

As guests gathered in a pavilion set amongst the glorious gardens of the Bisley's Yarra Valley estate, the most excited audience members were Warwick and Paulette's young granddaughters, sitting front row

and centre eager with anticipation. The youngest, Pippa, shared that she "would like to be an opera singer" and was taking particular note!

The audience were not disappointed with Jeremy and Zoe, accompanied on piano by Jodie Lockyer, delivering a superb program of operatic favourites and some lighter repertoire for good measure, including the entertaining 'Green Eyed Dragon' where Jeremy's knack for storytelling had everyone sitting on the edge of their seats.

Afternoon tea in the sun-filled gardens was the perfect finale for this lovely afternoon and artists were able to take a little piece of the Yarra Valley home with them thanks to a thoughtful gift of local produce from Paulette and Warwick.



Warwick & Paulette Bisley with the artists



PARLOUR PLEASURES: JOE SAMBROOK AND MARY-JANE GETHING

UPHOLDING THE TRADITION OF PARLOUR PERFORMANCES IN THEIR EAST MELBOURNE HOME, MELBA OPERA TRUST SUPPORTERS JOE SAMBROOK AND MARY-JANE GETHING WELCOMED AN INTIMATE PARTY OF GUESTS TO ENJOY A SPECIAL SOIREE.

Recipient of the Joseph Sambrook Opera Scholarship in 2014 and 2015, bass-baritone Jeremy Kleeman, together with the Melba's Associate Repetiteur Stefan Cassomenos, delighted their audience with a varied and well-received program including works by Mozart, Schubert and Britten.

Mary-Jane shared her enjoyment of the event with us and was proud of the opportunity to introduce Jeremy and Stefan to her friends:

"We'd told our friends about our connection with Melba Opera Trust, but it was all a bit academic until they attended this event. It took a while to find a date, because Jeremy and Stefan are so busy and in demand! Stefan had played a concerto the week before, there was a PLEXUS concert the night after, and the day after that he was off to Europe to give recitals. Jeremy was in the middle of rehearsals for Handel's opera *Faramondo* for Brisbane Baroque, and flew down for our soirée – quite wonderful! We were keen to include Stefan, because we'd met him through the Trust, and were

very taken with his trio PLEXUS, which we now also support. I thought the performance was stunningly good – not surprising, of course – and everyone mingled afterwards over refreshments in a very relaxed atmosphere."

Appreciative of the good fortune he has enjoyed through Joe and Mary-Jane's generosity, Jeremy found the occasion to be a "fantastic experience":

"Joe and Mary-Jane have been wonderfully supportive of me, so it was such a pleasure to give something back and to represent to their friends what they are supporting! Singing in such an intimate venue can be intimidating, but I was mentally prepared well before. It was great to perform with Stefan Cassomenos – a top musician and an amazing colleague. I was very happy with the way it went."

These sentiments were echoed by Stefan:

"It was an exciting evening, and an honour finally to perform for our wonderful patrons Joe Sambrook and Mary-Jane Gething."

OPERA IN THE WRIGHT-SMITH ARENA...

WHAT STARTED AS A SMALL BIRTHDAY GATHERING FIVE YEARS AGO HAS NOW BECOME A HIGHLY ANTICIPATED EVENT ON THE MELBA OPERA TRUST CALENDAR.

AT ONE OF OUR MORE UNUSUAL SETTINGS – THE WRIGHT-SMITH DRESSAGE ARENA IN THE PICTURESQUE YARRA VALLEY – THIS ANNUAL CELEBRATION IN AID OF JOHN'S BIRTHDAY CONTINUES TO EVOLVE WITH EACH PASSING YEAR. WHILE JOHN WOULD PREFER THAT THE EMPHASIS WAS ON MELBA OPERA TRUST AND ITS SCHOLARS, IT SEEMS OTHERS THOUGHT DIFFERENTLY:

"The second time we held the event, 20 or 30 friends were included and I insisted my birthday was not mentioned. In the following years, the audience has grown to the 120 guests we had this year. Without my consent, Melba Opera Trust staff organised a magnificent chocolate birthday cake with candles and 'Happy Birthday John, from the Melba's' written on the top. Melba Chair, Rob Logie-Smith made a special trip to present the cake, and I was given a stirring rendition of 'Happy Birthday'. It was the first time I have heard it sung so beautifully – by opera singers!"

the stage is dominated by large cream tree trunks of manna gums, so this is certainly a novel atmosphere in which to sing!"

Following three years of tenor Brenton Spiteri holding the John & Elizabeth Wright-Smith Scholarship, the absence of a tenor in this year's concert was somewhat unique! Instead, the performance featured this year's new John & Elizabeth Wright-Smith Scholarship recipient, the highly talented counter-tenor, Nicholas Tolputt. Nicholas was joined by soprano Morgan Balfour and mezzo-



Liz & John Wright-Smith with Nicholas Tolputt

Along with the developing talents of the scholars, some family talents were showcased by John and Elizabeth's grandchildren, Sam and Matt Clarke, playing Bach's *Concerto for Two Violins 1st Movement* to commence proceedings, accompanied by our own Sharolyn Kimmorley, AM.

John enjoys the novelty of marrying the operatic talents of the scholars with the inviting surrounds of his property and considers it an idyllic venue for performance:

"The singers don't have to be saddled and bridled, and their manes and tails don't need brushing and plaiting immediately before their appearance. Furthermore, they don't take fright when loud applause occurs. But more seriously, the structure of the arena is such that the singers have a closed wall behind the stage, and sing to an open air theatre, but with a high roof. According to some experts, the sound is glorious, and of the same quality throughout the arena. The view from

soprano, Jade Moffat and together they performed a wonderfully varied program of music ranging from Bach to Kurt Weill:

"Many members of the audience were not only unfamiliar with the term 'counter-tenor', but had never heard such a voice. The three singers were outstanding, and mixed freely with the audience over afternoon tea following the concert. It was also the first time that Melba Opera Trust Artistic Advisor, Sharolyn Kimmorley AM had accompanied the singers in the arena, and she was justifiably praised as 'the ears' of Melba Opera Trust. Sharolyn was roundly applauded for her vital role in the singers' development. This was all reflected in the exceptionally large number of thank-you cards, letters, emails and phone calls we received afterwards."

Same time, same place next year John?

A GOLDEN AFFAIR AT COOMBE

In March this year retired director of Board and long-time friend of Melba Opera Trust, Jenny Sutherland, and her husband David, celebrated their 50th 'golden' wedding anniversary.

Jenny is the great niece of Dame Nellie Melba and so Coombe – the Melba Estate – was a natural choice of venue. Family and friends gathered to celebrate in the Yarra Valley.

"After marrying, my grandfather purchased his own property in the Yarra Valley. Then my father, Tom, married and bought his own property in the Valley, where I spent my childhood. So Coombe seemed the ideal venue for our anniversary. We had drinks in the garden, and then lunch in the restaurant."

To mark the occasion, guests were treated to a special performance:

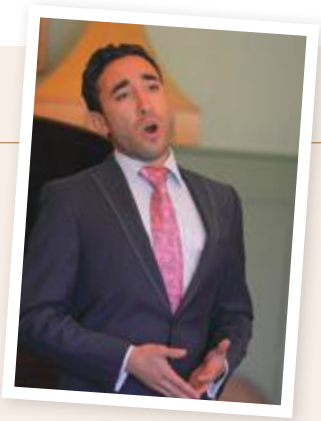
"We were able to engage Melba scholar, soprano Nikki Hill and pianist Amir Farid to sing a brief, light program of works by Puccini, Ivor Novello and Jerome Kern for our 80-plus guests. The Melba Conservatorium and now Melba Opera Trust have always been, and still are, close to our hearts. For David and I, the day was very special."

Melba Opera Trust was privileged to have been involved in celebrating this auspicious occasion and sends warm congratulations to Jenny and David.

LETTERS FROM ABROAD

FLY AWAY BRENTON!

JOHN AND ELIZABETH WRIGHT-SMITH SCHOLARSHIP HOLDER FROM 2012 TO 2014, TENOR BRENTON SPITERI, HAS RECENTLY RETURNED FROM A SUCCESSFUL TRIP TO EUROPE.



In May, he sang in the Sydney Chamber Opera production of Elliott Gyger’s new opera *Fly Away Peter*, based on David Malouf’s novel of the same name. He took time out from final rehearsals to write and update us on his recent activities, and to share some exciting news.

1 May 2015
Hi everyone,
I’m writing this letter from Sydney, which is not exactly abroad, however, I have just returned from a three-month trip to Germany and there is a lot to catch up on!

The bulk of my trip was spent studying German at a language school in Berlin. All lessons took place in German and my fellow students and I spoke German together outside class. Studying a foreign language for four hours a day, Monday to Friday, was an intense experience. Luckily, I already speak French reasonably well, so the rules of learning a European language were clear to me. I made quite a lot of progress because of this, although my German is by no means perfect. It was ultimately an amazing experience, and one that has given me a new and very useful skill.

From a singing perspective, I worked with several coaches and gained some

valuable insight into the workings of the opera industry in Europe while I was away. It must be said that Berlin itself is a city that is well worth visiting. It is fast becoming one of my favourite places in the world for its dynamic music and arts culture, progressive politics, and vast array of interesting people from all walks of life. As far as opera goes, there aren’t many cities in the world that boast three enormous opera houses within minutes of each other!

I was also fortunate enough to do a successful audition for the young artist program at National Opéra de Lyon, France, while I was away. This is exciting news, and means that I will relocate to Lyon for four-five months towards the end of 2015. I will take part in training and mentoring sessions as part of the program, and will perform in one of the company’s operas in the 2015/16 season.

As I write this, I am just about to head into production week for Sydney Chamber Opera’s world premiere production of *Fly Away Peter*, after the novel by David Malouf. The opera version has been written by Melbourne composer Elliott Gyger, with a libretto by Pierce Wilcox. It tells the story of a young Australian birdwatcher named *Jim Saddler*, who enlists as a soldier

in the First World War. I play the role of *Ashley*, Jim’s friend and fellow soldier; however, I also play eight other characters throughout the piece. The plus side of this is that I haven’t had to do any exercise for a while, as blocking the show has kept me on my toes!

I’m very proud to be a part of this production, telling this important story in an original and thought-provoking way. My colleagues are all phenomenal. Elliot and Pierce have written a beautiful opera, which the production team and cast have turned into an incredibly moving piece of theatre. Whilst the opera is hugely challenging, as well as physically and emotionally draining, it is well worth the satisfaction that we feel after a successful run.

Once this show finishes, I will be back in Melbourne rehearsing and performing in *The Barber of Seville* with Melbourne Opera Company, in amongst a number of concerts, before I head back to Europe at the start of September. I’ve loved my time away but I am looking forward to being back amongst family and friends for a month or two.

Much love,
Brenton

‘TWILIGHT IN THE GARDEN’:

MELBA AT BELEURA

FOR THE FIFTH YEAR IN A ROW, MELBA OPERA TRUST AND THE TALLIS FOUNDATION PRESENTED A GLITTERING OCCASION AT THE BEAUTIFUL BELEURA HOUSE AND GARDEN IN MORNINGTON.

The Mornington summer house of the Tallis Family for many decades and John Tallis’ home from 1950, Beleura is an exceptional place. When composer John Tallis died in 1996, he left this property to the people of Victoria, requesting it become a house museum. In November 2004 his dream was realised, and Beleura is now open to the public. Visitors can even walk through the palatial guest room where Dame Nellie herself slept when she stayed there.

The musical evening ‘Twilight in the Garden’ took place on two consecutive nights in March. Guests enjoyed drinks in the Palm Garden before enjoying a musical soiree in the purpose-designed performance building, the Tallis Pavilion.

Our philosophy of ‘once a Melba always a Melba’ was illustrated with the return of alumna Kyla Allan who travelled from Sydney to join scholars Daniel Carison and Morgan Balfour in performance, accompanied on piano by Amir Farid.

As the current recipient of the Beleura-Tallis Opera Scholarship, Daniel Carison particularly appreciated the opportunity to visit Beleura.

“Given the connection with Melba Opera Trust, it was nice to walk through the performing space and see Melba’s piano placed in the corner – that really set the tone for the performance. We had quite minimal staging, but I think it was very



Kyla Allan, Daniel Carison & Morgan Balfour

effective. Having a few props seems to give the audience a bit more comfort, and there’s a bit more happening on the stage. It was a great event.”

‘Twilight in the Garden’ follows a performance given last December by 2014 recipient of the Beleura-Tallis Opera Scholarship, Matthew Reardon. Matthew has just been announced as this years recipient of the Australian International Opera Award and will be relocating to Wales later in the year to study with renowned tenor Dennis O’Neill, at the Wales International Academy of Voice. Bravo, Matthew!

Melba Opera Trust remains grateful to the Tallis Foundation for providing the annual Beleura-Tallis Opera Scholarship in the Melba Opera Trust program.

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