

THE MELBA

MAGAZINE OF MELBA OPERA TRUST

Edition 17 Spring 2017

BEING MELBA WITH EMMA MATTHEWS

A MEZZO ASCENDING - EMILY EDMONDS
WINS DAME HEATHER BEGG AWARD

A FOREIGN CONCEPT - LANGUAGE,
CULTURE AND ETIQUETTE



Melba

CONTENTS —

- PAGE 2
- Note from the General Manager
 - About Melba Opera Trust
 - Sterling Leadership and Vision

- PAGE 3
- Since We Last Wrote

- PAGE 4-5
- The Complete Performer
 - The Taste of Language
 - A Foreign Concept – Culture, Etiquette and Visas

- PAGE 6
- An Honour for Sharolyn
 - A Ruskin Fundraiser

- PAGE 7
- Learning by Doing – Melba Artists Performance Program

- PAGE 8
- A Mezzo Ascending – the Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award 2017

- PAGE 9
- Into the Sacred Space
 - A Sense of Community

- PAGE 10
- Being Melba

- PAGE 11
- Third Time's a Charm

- PAGE 12
- Letter from Abroad – Jade Moffat
 - Supporters of Melba Opera Trust

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NOTE FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER —



Spring is upon us and with it comes audition circuits, the commencement of young artist programs in the UK, Europe and America and some of Australia's most prestigious singing competitions.

In this edition of *The Melba*, you will read how each of our scholars has been working to prepare for these important 'next steps' and how Melba Opera Trust continues to support their development with our three-tier program. One of our challenges is to ensure that the suite of Melba programs remain responsive to the ever-changing world of opera. Recent enhancements to the Mentor Program are highlighted in the pages that follow.

One of the clearest tests of our adaptability is the post-Melba experiences of our alumni. Some recent success particularly worth noting include alumna Fiona Jopson receiving the Vienna State Opera Award which will see Fiona relocating to Vienna later this year to commence work with Vienna State Opera. Daniel Carison and Damian Arnold both received significant prizes in the Australian Singing Competition and Daniel's success

continued with him winning the German-Australian Opera Grant: a twelve-month contract with Wiesbaden Opera from the middle of next year. Last month, Bronwyn Douglas received the prestigious Dame Joan Sutherland & Richard Bonyngel Bel Canto Award along with a suite of other awards including the Audience Choice. Melba proudly congratulates Fiona, Damian, Daniel and Bronwyn on their achievements and we are looking forward to cheering for Bronwyn in the final of the Lady Fairfax New York Competition later this month and alum Michael Petrucelli in this year's Herald Sun Aria.

Our scholars and alumni continue to take great strides nationally and internationally and with great excitement we look forward to hearing Siobhan Stagg, Alexandra Flood, Jeremy Kleeman, Brenton Spiteri, Timothy Newton, Nathan Lay and Cleo Lee-McGowan appearing in Victorian Opera's 2018 season.

Stacey Alleaume will reprise her role of Micaëla (*Carmen*) and Violetta (*La traviata*) with Opera Australia next year, Samuel Piper will make his debut with Opera Queensland as Masetto (*Don Giovanni*) and you can hear Nicholas Tolputt perform both *Messiah* and *Bernstein Classics* with Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

At Melba headquarters, planning is underway for our own 2018 program as we prepare to hear the next generation of promising young singers at November auditions. Our esteemed Artistic Advisor, Sharolyn Kimmorley AM will lead our selection panel and is joined by internationally renowned conductor Johannes Fritzsch and Artistic Director of New Zealand Opera, Stuart Maunder AM.

I would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the Melba community for once again helping us to deliver an exceptional year for our scholars. I hope you enjoy reading about the fruits of your support in the following pages of *The Melba*.

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

STERLING LEADERSHIP AND VISION —



This year's AGM marked the end of an era for Melba Opera Trust with former Chair Robert G Logie-Smith AM retiring from the Board after over a decade of service.

Among the gestures of appreciation dedicated to Rob in previous months from the Melba community was the extraordinary announcement of the Reilly & Logie-Smith Mentor Endowment, a tribute to Rob & Sue Logie-Smith established by Director Peter Reilly.

As a final and lasting tribute in the presence of Company members,

Melba Opera Trust honoured Rob with its most esteemed acknowledgement; the awarding of a Melba Medal.

The tradition of the Melba Medal commenced in 1993 with the inaugural recipient, Joan Arnold OBE, receiving the accolade on her retirement as Director of the Melba Conservatorium of Music. The medal has since been awarded 14 times to acknowledge similarly exceptional contributions to the Melba. Rob's medal cites his tenure as Chair, marked by his "sterling leadership and vision".

Rob joins the following list of luminaries, all of whom have helped shape Melba Opera Trust into the world class program that it is today:

Melba Medal Recipients

1993	JOAN ARNOLD OBE
1994	PETER BRERETON
1997	BILL RASHLEIGH
1998	LYNETTE CASEY-BRERETON
2009	THE LATE PAMELA, LADY VESTEY
2009	ALFRED RUSKIN AM (POSTHUMOUS)
2009	STEPHEN BOLTON (POSTHUMOUS)
2009	BILL JOSCELYNE (POSTHUMOUS) & MARY-JANE JOSCELYNE
2009	GRAHAM SELLARS-JONES
2010	PROFESSOR MEL WATERS
2012	JENNY SUTHERLAND
2014	JOHN & ELIZABETH WRIGHT-SMITH
2015	PROFESSORS JOSEPH SAMBROOK & MARY-JANE GETHING
2017	ROBERT G LOGIE-SMITH AM



SINCE WE LAST WROTE

AN UPDATE FROM OUR 2017 MELBA SCHOLARS



Damian Arnold (Tenor)

Eleanor Blakemore Opera Society Scholarship

2017 has been full of many exciting opportunities. I recently performed in Opera Australia's production of *Parsifal*. The opportunity to hear Jonas Kaufmann sing in his native tongue was inspirational.

I had the honour of performing in the finals of the IFAC Australian Singing Competition in July, with the Opera Australia orchestra, under the baton of Nicholas Milton AM. This was an incredible experience and I am thrilled to have won prizes to study with David Harper in London and to study Italian in Italy.

I really enjoyed working with legendary soprano Yvonne Kenny AM in the July Mentor Program block in Sydney, especially as this will provide an excellent contact in London where I have recently relocated to begin my study at Guildhall School of Music and Drama.



Daniel Carison (Baritone)

Paulette Bisley Opera Scholarship & Ruskin Opera Award

I feel as though 2017 has been a year full of great strides for me. Since my international debut as Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte* with the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra, I was awarded the prestigious German-Australian Opera Grant and am now preparing to make the great leap of relocating to Germany in 2018. The award means that I have been offered a 12 month contract with the Hessisches Staatstheater in Wiesbaden where I will be a principle artist within the company. It has always been my long term

goal to move to Germany and this opportunity has provided just that. As well as opera, this year I have also spent a great deal of time carving a career as a concert singer. In September I completed the last chapter of my Schubert trilogy with a performance of *Die Schöne Müllerin* with artistic partner, Geoff Urquhart.



Bronwyn Douglass (Mezzo-soprano)

Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship

I have been performing as well as competing in many eisteddfods and competitions. I am thrilled to have been a finalist in the Sydney Eisteddfod Opera Scholarship and placed second in the Opera and Arts Support Group Vocal Scholarship. I have also been named as a finalist in the Opera Foundation for Young Australians Lady Fairfax New York Scholarship and the Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyngel Bel Canto Award. It was very exciting to be singing in the Opera Australia Chorus for the first time in August in the Verdi Requiem and *Parsifal*. *Parsifal* in particular was an amazing experience, with so many phenomenal artists involved. I am looking forward to starting rehearsals for the Tudor Portraits concerts with Sydney Philharmonia Choirs to be performed in the City Recital Hall in late August. Since time of writing, Bronwyn was announced the winner of the Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyngel Bel Canto Award along with the Georg Solti Accademia di Bel Canto Summer School Prize, the Tait Memorial Trust Prize and the Audience Choice Award.



Zoe Drummond (Soprano)

Dame Nellie Melba Scholarship & Patrick & Vivian Gordon Award

2017 has been an incredible year. I understudied the lead role of Giroflé/Girofla in *Two Weddings, One Bride* with Opera Australia. Attending rehearsals and learning the demands of a cover was really wonderful. Perhaps the most thrilling was that I was able to put my studies to the test and go on for three shows with only a few hours notice each time.

Once *Two Weddings, One Bride* was over, I was involved in the entirety of the Opera Australia chorus winter season. A definite highlight through this season was performing in *Parsifal* with Jonas Kaufmann – just magical!

My next chapter has now begun: I have moved to London to begin study at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, learning from Melba mentor and Australian opera icon, Yvonne Kenny AM.



Georgia Hall (Soprano)

Harold Blair Opera Scholarship Mel & Nina Waters Award

Life is busy! Between the Mentor blocks I have been studying voice at the University of Newcastle Conservatorium of Music where I have recently been awarded The Doris Smith Scholarship. As self-directed study, I challenged myself to produce an opera for the first time, successfully staging and performing as Laetitia in Menotti's *The Old Maid and the Thief*. I've enjoyed performing as a Melba artist at various concerts in and around Melbourne, while preparing for the finals of the Joan Sutherland Richard Bonyngel Foundation's inaugural Sydney Song Prize. Recently, I was honoured to be invited to perform a recital with pianist Claire Howard Race at a private soirée in the home of Deborah Humble and Bruce Caldwell.

In the autumn edition of *The Melba* I mentioned that I was looking forward to working with Yvonne Kenny, AM as part of the Mentor

Program. When my fellow scholars and I were afforded this opportunity in July, her masterclass and private sessions were invaluable and the experience was something I'll never forget!



Cleo Lee-McGowan (Soprano)

Joseph Sambrook Opera Scholarship

It has been such a privilege to work with Melba mentors such as Yvonne Kenny AM, Emma Matthews and Stuart Skelton. It is always invaluable to hear their opinions and advice, and note the difference in sound between the start and end of our session. In July, we learnt all about the power of stage make up; I loved seeing my appearance transform from glamorous girl to old witch! It has been a great learning experience to work with opera directors. The time we spent with Patrick Nolan was so beneficial for me as he helped us strike the right balance of acting in an audition setting. It is vital for singers to possess foreign language skills, so I was thrilled to begin German recently, in addition to continuing with Italian and French. These last few months have been an incredible experience and have allowed me to develop not only my vocal ability, but also my stagecraft and business skills.



Samuel Piper (Baritone)

John & Elizabeth Wright-Smith Scholarship

I have had some fantastic opportunities since we last wrote – among these have been my first St. Matthew Passion, which I performed in the Northern Rivers of NSW. It has been a great pleasure to

collaborate with Opera Queensland and Expressions Dance Company on their recent production *Mozart Airborne*. Alongside performing, I have been working with my voice teacher, Dr. Margaret Schindler, on developing and building my instrument. These sessions are complemented by my ongoing work with Brisbane-based coaches and language teachers.

I am looking forward to performing my first *Moralès* in *Carmen* with QSO, conducted by Alondra de la Parra and am very excited to have been cast as Masetto in Opera Queensland's 2018 production of *Don Giovanni*.



Jonathan Wilson (Repetiteur)

Margaret Schofield Opera Scholarship

There have been many exciting developments taking place in my professional life recently. I have been awarded the Geoffrey Parsons Award in Adelaide, the only national competition for collaborative pianists in Australia. I have also taken part in many exciting concert opportunities including the Melbourne Recital Centre 'Nights at the Opera' concert presented by MOT, with scholars past and present. Furthermore I have been fortunate enough to work with diva superstar Amelia Farrugia in many concerts around Australia, and most importantly 'Diva' at the City Recital Hall, Angel Place in Sydney.

MOT have facilitated me to work with some of the finest vocal coaches and répétiteurs in the country including Sharolyn Kimmorley, Jennifer Marten-Smith and Stephen Mould at furthering my knowledge of the operatic repertoire. I have also enjoyed playing for many of the master classes that have taken place during the Melba Mentor Blocks including those given by Stuart Skelton and Yvonne Kenny AM.

THE COMPLETE PERFORMER

"The opera singer of today needs to be a complete performer. They must not only have control of their voices, but they must be able to work with their bodies to create all-round complex, believable characters."

Stagecraft and character development are a key focus for a developing young opera singer. While scholars undertake individual stagecraft coaching using their scholarship funding, development is further supported through scheduled activities of the Mentor Program. This year, our scholars have worked on character development with Lindy Hume (retired Artistic Director of Queensland Opera), scene-staging with Stuart Maunder (Artistic Director New Zealand Opera) and audition stagecraft with Patrick Nolan (Incoming Artistic Director Opera Queensland).

"Each year we engage a variety of industry acclaimed directors to work with scholars on various aspects of stagecraft and character", said General Manager, Amy Black. "The scholars are able to experience different styles of directing and are challenged with different perspectives which they can then apply in their artistic work. Ultimately, we hope it will help them develop their own approach."

Fresh from leading his two-day workshop with Melba scholars in our Mentor Block in July, we spoke to Patrick about what he feels opera companies are seeking in their young artists. Patrick's broad sense

is that "audiences are becoming more adept at reading character, and their expectations of acting standards are higher". This, he suggests, is because "television and cinema have become such a dominant part of our daily lives, and the acting is usually of such a high standard, that when people come into an opera house, they expect the same – the acting has to be believable and skillful."

Patrick had this firmly in mind as he approached the recent workshop with Melba scholars. Scholars brought arias to the session and "we analysed those arias from a character perspective to look at how they (the singers) can embody the characters and get into the world of the character and the story they are singing about in as nuanced and rich a way as possible". Patrick adds that there is no one correct way to approach a character. "You could say that there are as many approaches to building a character as there are people on the planet."

As part of the process of developing their own, unique understanding of the character, Patrick stresses the necessity for the singer's body to be actively engaged. "Young artists' relationships with their bodies should be integrated and

comprehensive, and the technique is to apply this to their singing." For most young singers, this is the most challenging aspect of good stagecraft and something they need to dedicate focused time on.

It goes without saying that the process of character interpretation involves thorough preparation. Research into the context of the opera sets the scene so that singers can then explore the psychology of the character and their role within the opera. "For this, young singers really need to be curious and I appreciated that in the Melba scholars. We also focused on encouraging them to understand and use their bodies. It's challenging, but they're aiming to be complete performers – it's no longer acceptable merely to 'park and bark'."



Patrick Nolan working with Melba scholars

THE TASTE OF LANGUAGE

The task of learning a foreign language is challenging for anyone. However, if you are a hopeful young Australian opera singer faced with the prospect of mastering the diction of four or five foreign languages – and conversational proficiency in at least one – the process can be downright daunting!

In Australia, opportunities to be immersed in a foreign language are understandably rarer than for our European counterparts. While most of us are fortunate to have access to a foreign language from our early school days, the idea of mastering other languages simply isn't as inherent in our culture. For an emerging opera singer, however, it's fundamental and it presents a real challenge to scholars as they prepare to compete on the world stage.

This reality was obvious in the feedback we received from last year's Mentor Program review. International alumni identified the lack of language proficiency as one of their most significant disadvantages when establishing themselves abroad. Several alumni

commented that they now consider their language classes to be as important as their singing lessons and suggested that if they had their time with Melba again they would apply themselves more to language study – not just learning diction and grammar, but also participating in opportunities to 'practise' the language when on home soil.

While alumni stressed that language study underpinned their artistic development, they also noted the importance of language in helping them to integrate socially in a foreign country, to be able to form friendships with foreign language speakers and to provide flexibility when working with colleagues from a variety of backgrounds.

Language study has always been a central component of Melba scholarships with scholars using their scholarship funding for private tutoring, diction coaching and classroom study in language schools such as the Goethe Institute, the Italian Institute of Culture, the Dante Alighieri Society and the Alliance Française.

However, armed with this fresh feedback, General Manager Amy Black decided to place emphasis on language study. "As part of

this year's Mentor Program, we have introduced a conversational language focus. The intention is to complement the scholars' individual language study with activities and experiences to encourage them to speak more and to provide a more practical application of their language skills. Our hope is that scholars will develop a greater appreciation for the commitment that language study requires and that ultimately they will be better equipped for their operatic careers."

Scholars often undertake private tuition in Italian, French and German for the Melba program, but the focus this year has been on Italian. "For most singers, Italian is the first other language they encounter", says Melba Opera Trust Artistic Advisor Sharolyn Kimmorley AM. "It's probably the easiest to learn and pure Italian vowels are fundamental to a good vocal technique. And without question it's the language in which the bulk of the operatic repertoire is performed."

With all this in mind, the addition of a 'conversation' hour in each Mentor Block has now become a staple activity. With a native Italian speaker directing the conversation, scholars focus on refining their conversational Italian based on a



Teresa Desmarchelier working with melba scholars



Johannes Fritzsch working with scholar Samuel Piper, and scholar Jonathan Wilson at the piano



Teresa Desmarchelier with scholar Daniel Carlson

A FOREIGN CONCEPT – CULTURE, ETIQUETTE AND VISAS

“While as a foreigner you may be excused from certain social nuances, the best way to build better relationships is to understand as much as you can about the culture and each of the countries you visit.” Cecellia Telkes, Principal: Protocol and Etiquette Consultancy

For most of our scholars, carving a career in opera inevitably includes travel and more often than not, living abroad. It's a life changing experience and our alumni tell us the more that we can do to help prepare our scholars, the better. We've already discussed the importance of language; now we focus on cultural understanding, country-specific work ethics and the complexity of the working visa!

A few years ago we welcomed Cecellia Telkes into the Mentor Program to work with scholars on etiquette and help them hold their own at the finest of dinner tables. This year, we expanded the brief and asked Cecellia to build in some handy hints on how to behave when living and working in various European countries.

“How should one dress?” is often the first question. In the UK and Germany, advises Cecellia, “for more formal meetings it's best to be conservative, while in France and Italy, it may be worthwhile investing in well-tailored clothing. Having said that, being in the artistic industry, some creativity in dressing can

enhance one's presence – style over fashion is the key!”

Australians are often known for their relaxed, easy going nature, however punctuality should be a given. “It is essential to be punctual, no matter where you are.” Of course, how punctuality is valued may differ depending on where you are with little to no flexibility in Germany versus a somewhat more relaxed approach in Italy.

The best way to greet colleagues? “The first thing to remember is to address people by their right titles.” When deciding who to greet first in a room, in Germany, Cecellia suggests keeping “age over beauty” in mind. “Personal space is important in the UK”, she cautions, “so apart from handshakes, it is best to avoid being physical during conversations, such as touching someone's arm or back”. In France, men will generally shake hands when they meet though less firmly than in Australia, while women are more likely to air-kiss each other – “anywhere from two to four times, so try to go with the flow”, is the recommendation. “And when in Italy – well, anywhere, really – don't forget to take some wrapped chocolates or pastries if you're invited to someone's home”.

All this might seem difficult to remember, but as Cecellia reassured scholars, “if you bear in mind the basic principles of good etiquette – consideration, respect and honesty – you'll likely make the right choices.”

To complement Cecellia's session, this year we have also introduced a

tailored discussion with Australian mezzo-soprano Deborah Humble. Deborah has lived and worked in Italy, France, UK and Germany, which we thought made her the ideal candidate to deliver a candid industry chat. The intention is for Deborah to discuss some of the practicalities and challenges that singers face when arriving in a new country and are trying to establish themselves. Common country-specific audition practice will be an area of focus, along with other industry-specific (and social!) pointers to help arm scholars with useful information.

Like Cecellia, Deborah will also emphasize punctuality along with always using people's correct titles. “In Germany, you should never address anyone by their first name unless invited to do so and it's best not to ask people ‘How are you?’, because Germans you don't know won't indulge in idle chit chat!”

Scholars will have the opportunity to discuss how best to approach agents and secure auditions, including the importance of good research and personalising letters or approach. “I recommend the Deutsche Bühnen Jahrbuch (www.buehnengenossenschaft.de) for a list of all German theatres. It's a good idea to write well in advance and to be aware of the audition seasons from September to December and January to April”, she says. Knowing opera terminology is also useful. For example, what is a ‘Fach’ (a term used in Germany since the 19th century to categorise voices). And

what is a ‘Fest’ (firm) as opposed to a ‘Gast’ (guest) contract?

But while Deborah says it's true that “Australians may need to work harder at language and understanding foreign culture, customs and systems”, she adds some words of consolation: “You only have to note the high numbers of Australian singers and instrumentalists enjoying success abroad to realise an international career is absolutely possible. The teachers and opera coaches I have spoken to in Germany, France and Italy are very positive about the contribution Australian artists can make in a European environment.”

We couldn't agree more, and this year's scholars have been fortunate to have regular skype discussions with alumni from around the globe who are only too happy to share their ‘on the ground’ insights.

As the final piece to the puzzle, it's all well and good to know how to behave when you are in a foreign country, but getting there in the first place can be an obstacle in itself. An ever-changing landscape, the world of international visas is vast and complex. For the first time in October, we have engaged Visa specialists to de-mystify the process and better explain what options are available for Australian singers.

particular topic of discussion. The only rule – no English!

Regular Italian diction coaching has reinforced the artistic process, as have a number of more unique ‘Italian’ experiences. Italian language expert Teresa Desmarchelier led an all-eating, all-speaking Italian cooking class, with scholars delighting in rolling their own gnocchi. They also attended a social *aperitivo*, enjoying pizza and Italian conversation with regular Melba Mentor, Italian soprano Daria Masiero. Daria delivered an Italian repertoire master class, with the last hour being presented in Italian, and the year will be capped off with an Italian dinner – Italian cuisine, Italian waiters, three Italian speakers and our scholars.

Why food, *aperitivo* and conversation? As Sharolyn points out, “the biggest challenge is to lose the fear of speaking and making mistakes. We felt it may help if we encouraged the use of the language in more relaxed and informal situations, where the singers can develop confidence and make more progress.”

Speaking more broadly, Sharolyn cannot stress enough the importance of learning languages.

While impeccable diction is important in every language, be it Italian, French, German, Russian or Czech, “being able to speak and think in the language you are singing in gives a freedom and spontaneity that is essential as a performer”.

This year, Mentor Blocks have also been themed into specific languages – Italian, French and German – featuring intensive language coaching and masterclasses supporting the respective language focus.

Our ‘German’ block took place in September and featured a master class in German repertoire with German conductor Johannes Fritzsche, as well as coachings with native German vocal coach, Jenifer Marten-Smith. Johannes echoes Sharolyn's opinion on the necessity for young Australian singers to work hard on developing language skills because “the competition is significant and the stakes are high”. While correct pronunciation is essential, it's not enough. “You want to know what the words mean – not just in a general sense, but specifically”, he says. This complicates matters because “the language we use in operas is not always the language we speak now – the Italian of Mozart's time is not

what is spoken nowadays in Rome or Milan”. But the most effective way to absorb another language, according to Johannes, is to live for at least six months in the country where the language is spoken. Even though many stage directors from the UK and the USA operate in English in German opera houses, “to sing the role in German – that's a task! You really need to get the feeling, the taste, the flavour, the instinct of the language and how it's used in context.” This is something Johannes understands from his own experience, having studied less English than French or Russian when growing up in East Germany and therefore being on a steep learning curve when he came to Australia first in 1992.

For those scholars who embrace the idea of the new conversational language program, Sharolyn believes it's a very useful method. Perhaps after their conversations and culinary adventures, singers can venture overseas with more confidence, ready to absorb the nuances of other languages to which Johannes refers. Sharolyn sums it all up well: “A language is like good food or wine – you must love the taste of the words in your mouth!”

The 2017 Mentor Program is made possible by:

John and Elizabeth Wright-Smith
Reilly & Logie-Smith Mentor Endowment
Lady Southey AC
Hamer Family Fund
Stuart Leslie Foundation



AN HONOUR FOR SHAROLYN —



It is with great pride that we acknowledge our Artistic Advisor, Sharolyn Kimmorley AM, as the recipient of this year's MOST Achievement Award (MAA)

MOST (administrators of the IFAC Handa Australian Singing Competition) established the MAA Award to acknowledge the contributions of established industry professionals and recognise elite

members of the classical music fraternity. Sharolyn's award marks the second of its kind, with the inaugural award being received last year by Maestro Richard Bonyng AC, CBE.

Nominated by a panel of industry peers, Sharolyn received the prestigious accolade in recognition of her long and distinguished career. In presenting the MAA, Jeffrey Black, Chair of the ASC Music Advisory Committee, praised Sharolyn for her "exceptional musician's ear and unstinting, unrelenting commitment to excellence".

In her acceptance speech Sharolyn expressed her gratitude along with the promise that she will "continue to share (her) experiences with this wonderful profession".

We are very pleased to hear it! Our warmest congratulations Sharolyn – a well-deserved honour.



Roz Zalewski-Ruskin, Ruskin scholar Daniel Carison & Jeremy Ruskin QC

A RUSKIN FUNDRAISER —

The Ruskin Opera Award reflects the commitment of Melba Opera Trust Chair Roz Zalewski-Ruskin and husband Jeremy Ruskin QC to the recognition of talented young artists. It continues the legacy of Jeremy's parents, Alfred and Pamela Ruskin, who were extremely active supporters of the Arts and had a particular fondness for the Melba Conservatorium where Alfred served as Chairman of Council from 1972-1996.

Each year, Roz and Jeremy generously host an event, primarily to showcase the development of Ruskin Opera Award scholars to their syndicate of friends and associates and particularly to those who have supported the Ruskin Opera Award so far. As Roz points out, "it is also an opportunity to introduce potential new supporters, and raise additional funds for Melba Opera Trust".

The occasion was held on 19 August at Cranlana, the magnificent Toorak mansion owned by Melbourne's Myer family. This year it took the form of a three-course dinner presented by Fred & Ginger Catering, including fine Shelmerdine wines provided by Melba Opera Trust Deputy Chair, Kate Shelmerdine, and husband Stephen Shelmerdine. Dinner and lively conversation was interspersed with two brackets of musical performances by Ruskin Opera Award alumna Stacey Alleaume (soprano) and current Ruskin Award holder Daniel Carison (baritone), accompanied on piano by Associate Artist Rhodri Clarke.

The musical program had been designed to showcase important moments of Stacey and Daniel's

careers and provide a glimpse into their journey. For example, Daniel performed 'Papagena, Papagena' from *The Magic Flute*; an aria he performed when he won this year's German Australian Opera Grant which will see him relocating to Germany next year. Stacey delighted audiences with Violetta's aria 'È strano... Sempre libera' from *La traviata*, a role she understudied for Opera Australia and had four hours notice before having to take to the stage to perform the role!

A silent auction was also a feature of the evening guests vying for the opportunity to enjoy a private opera soiree in their own home, a gourmet dinner party for 10 people donated by Fred & Ginger Catering, and six bottles of premium 2012 Scotchmans Hill Cornelius Syrah generously donated by Melba Opera Trust Board member Peter Reilly.

The ballroom was still full at 11.30pm, the reflection of a wonderful evening enjoyed by all. Roz was thrilled with the outcome, heralding it a "very successful event" which raised over \$16,000 in support of the Ruskin Opera Award.



LEARNING BY DOING

– MELBA ARTISTS PERFORMANCE PROGRAM

The old adage that the best way to learn is by doing underpins Melba Opera Trust's Performance Program – Melba Artists. We source a range of performance experiences for our singers in a variety of venues from recitals to small operas, recordings, church music and private soirees.

These opportunities help our singers to become more versatile, develop confidence in their performance and give them a taste of life as a freelance artist. Singers are paid a fee for these performances, so as well as helping them put their learning into practice, they are provided with a modest level of professional income. And of course the program gives the singers greater public exposure and helps to raise their profile as young professional artists.

But the scholars are not the only ones to benefit. The experience of our Melba Artists clients is also enriched by having our singers perform for them and their friends, particularly in the intimate context of private dinner parties and functions.

A Birthday Celebration for John Dowling

In May this year, Melba supporter John Dowling engaged singers Cleo Lee-McGowan (soprano) and Daniel Carison (baritone), accompanied by Melba Associate Artist Rhodri Clarke, to perform at an elegant dinner party for 16 in the Gallery at The Australian Club to celebrate a 'significant birthday'. John's association with Melba goes back a long way, from when he attended a function at The Australian Club about 12 years ago, at which Melba Conservatorium students performed, including none other than our own Amy Black! Here John met former Melba Opera Trust Managing Director Mel Waters, who recommended a piano teacher to John from whom he still takes lessons. "From then on, we developed a very fond association with Melba and their artists", said John, "and five years ago we arranged a dinner at the Australian Club for another significant birthday, when Janet Todd, Brenton Spiteri and Amir Farid performed. It was such a wonderful evening, that it was just a question of when we'd do it again."

John pronounced the most recent event to be another great success. "I guess that was exemplified by the fact that come 11.30pm, no-one had gone home!" he added. The musical entertainment was spread across the evening, with one bracket after the entrée and the next after the main course. John had arranged the performance as a surprise, delighting guests when Cleo, Daniel and Rhodri appeared to sing the first set of operatic arias by Mozart, Donizetti and Puccini. The second bracket was a bit lighter, with some musical theatre and according to

John, "the final song – 'Wunderbar' by Cole Porter – really summed up the whole evening!"

John and wife Ros particularly appreciated that Daniel and Cleo were able to stay on after their performance and chat with guests, who relished the opportunity to talk with the singers about their developing careers. "It was a great privilege to have them", said John. "Ros and I are strong admirers of the work the Melba Opera Trust does, because the scholars learn every aspect – not just musical performance, but they are taught to manage their own careers as freelance artists, so providing opportunities for them to perform is a mutually satisfactory arrangement. We look forward to doing this again at a suitable time – anything we can contribute to Melba is worth doing."

Opera at the farm for Rex Swindel-Hurst

A month later in Flinders, Melba supporter Rex Swindel-Hurst hired Melba Artists to perform at a private event at his farm in Flinders on the Mornington Peninsula. On this occasion, Melba scholar Georgia Hall (soprano) and alumna Shakira Tsindos (mezzo-soprano) took to the stage, accompanied by Tim Mallis. Like John's, Rex's association with Melba Opera Trust goes back a few years and he has had the pleasure of being present at a number of Melba events. "The idea to have a performance in our own home had been on our to-do list for some time", Rex admitted. "We just needed an occasion and the birthday of a very dear friend who is an opera buff was the catalyst."

So Rex contacted Melba Artists Manager Jo Beaumont, "who organised everything beautifully,

and the date was set" Rex had clearly thought of everything, including hiring a driver to bring the performers to Flinders, "together with chicken sandwiches made by my wife's mother for the singers to munch on along the way!"

Meanwhile back at the farm, the 50 guests had enjoyed a sit-down lunch and a wander around the garden. According to Rex, "the atmosphere was buzzing because they all knew there was a surprise, but they didn't know what". All guests were seated by 3pm "and a wonderful repertoire of music was performed. We had Cilea, Mozart, Dvořák, Gounod, Poulenc, Bizet and Barber, and a selection from the musicals *My Fair Lady* and *Carousel* provided an uplifting finish." The audience was apparently enthralled throughout "and the show-stopper was an operatically-sung 'Happy Birthday' for our dear friend!"

Afternoon tea was served after the performance, "an opportunity for guests to mingle with our three new young friends and develop a new awareness by many of this unique and special organisation."

"The whole day was a triumph", Rex added, "and we got great feedback from our audience. It was a privilege to host Georgia, Shakira and Tim, and we hope to organise another soirée in the future. We thank Melba Opera Trust for their ongoing work."

A vineyard performance for De Bortoli

Melba Artists have also enjoyed performing for our wine partner De Bortoli, in the beautiful Yarra Valley.

Leanne De Bortoli spoke to a particularly successful dinner in their award winning restaurant Locale "We were entertaining a group of our

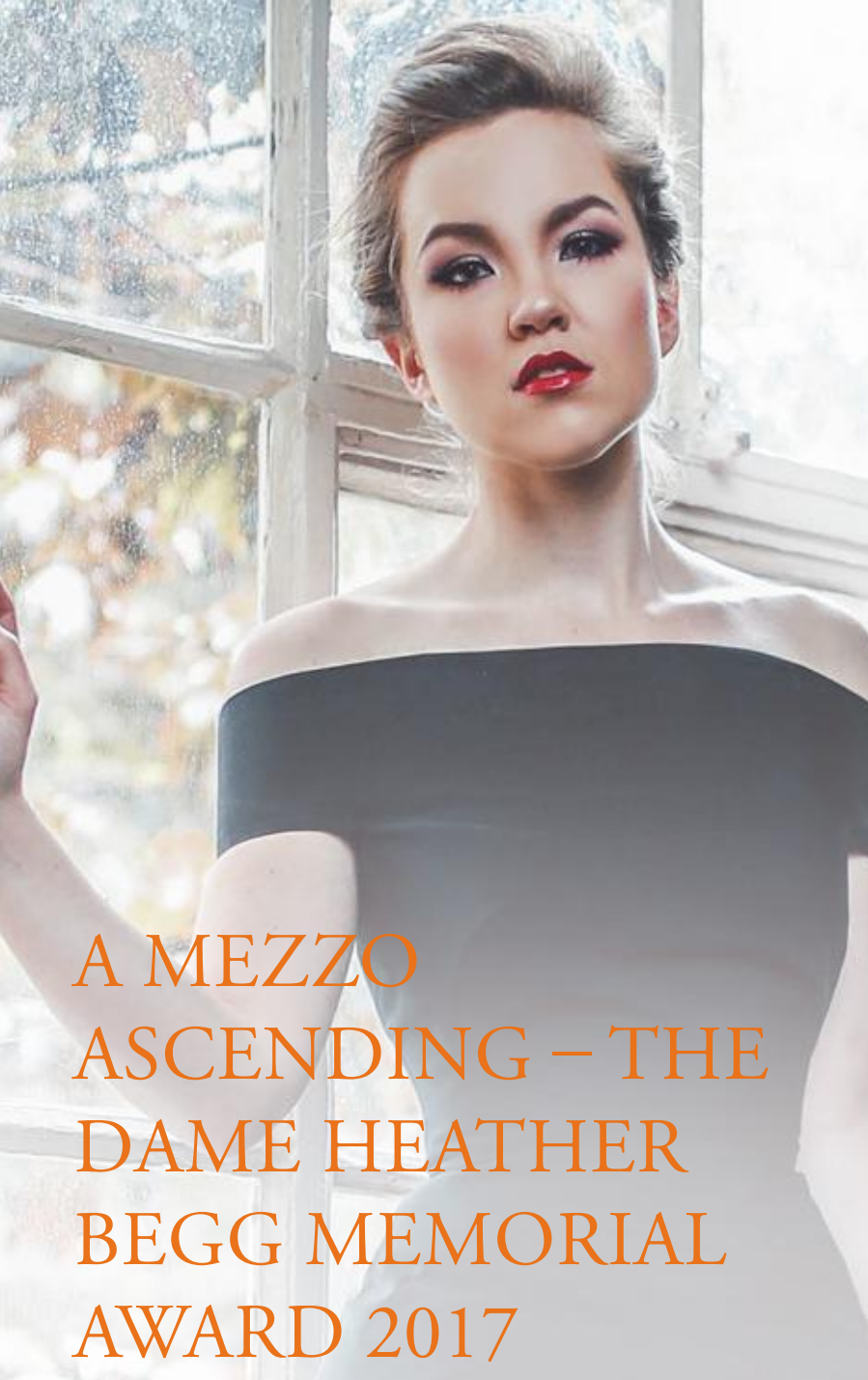
Chinese customers and decided to host a special dinner at our restaurant, Locale. We wanted it to be a memorable evening, and how better to do that than to pair beautiful food and wine with beautiful music. De Bortoli is very proud to support Melba Opera Trust and we thought it would be a nice way to highlight the relationship.

"Four singers delivered short musical brackets between each course and were a big hit with our guests, many taking a number of photos and video content. Melba arranged an electric piano for the evening and the musical program was perfect; a terrific balance of opera and lighter music theatre."

By all accounts, the evening was a resounding success. "The singers were exceptional and the feedback we received from our guests was very enthusiastic. We were so impressed that we're now planning a similar experience early next year for members of our Melba Wine Club to enjoy."

With De Bortoli's delicious range of La Bohème wines, we think an afternoon of Puccini could well be in order!

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FAMILY WINEMAKERS

A large, vertical photograph of Emily Edmonds, a young woman with light brown hair styled in an updo, wearing a black off-the-shoulder dress. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a bright, out-of-focus window with white frames.

A MEZZO ASCENDING – THE DAME HEATHER BEGG MEMORIAL AWARD 2017

It is with great excitement that we announce the fifth recipient of the esteemed Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award to be alumna mezzo-soprano Emily Edmonds.

This annual award was established through Dame Heather Begg's estate and upholds the legacy of the internationally-renowned New Zealand mezzo-soprano by providing a \$25,000 grant to support the artistic development of a gifted young Australian or New Zealand opera singer.

For the last two years Covent Garden in London has been Emily's artistic home as a member of the Jette Parker Young Artists Program. Begg Trustee Moffatt Oxenbould AM shared that, in selecting Emily, "we were very aware that she would be the first mezzo-soprano to receive the Begg Award, and that she has already been engaged to sing with several companies in which Dame Heather sang in the early stages of her international career".

Moffatt adds that "while Emily has already achieved much in her young career, it is desirable that, as she undertakes major roles with major companies, she can continue to work at the highest levels with well-regarded teachers and coaches with whom she has been associated as a member of the Jette Parker Young Artists Program. We believe that the award to Emily will certainly fulfil Dame Heather's wish that truly gifted Australian and New Zealand artists be assisted to give their best when undertaking the challenges of important artistic opportunities."

Emily is "incredibly touched to be the recipient of this meaningful award". She acknowledges Dame Heather Begg as "a singer who valued hard work and thorough preparation in order that she might fully inhabit and express the inner lives of the roles she performed. She is an inspiration in all that she believed in as an artist". So for Emily, "to represent Dame Heather's continued legacy is truly an honour". It also means a lot to the young mezzo that the award is "a connection to home and to Melba Opera Trust who were so instrumental in my early career development".

As a performer, Emily values "the ability to communicate clearly, with courage and with clarity of intention". She therefore sees "language study, thorough musical preparation, lifelong technical development and an ever-developing freedom of the physical body as vital components of artistry". This award will allow her "to continue living out these values at a time in my career when it may otherwise be challenging to dedicate resources to consistent growth and development". She plans to use the resources the award bestows to continue intensive study of the operatic languages, for singing lessons and musical coaching, to support her preparation of future roles and for sessions with world leaders in acting and movement. Emily also feels strongly about the need "to give back to or enhance the communities in which we live and work" and would like to consider ways in which she is able "to contribute to the musical community as a whole through the development and freedom of time" that this award allows her.

Having recently graduated from the Jette Parker Young Artists Programme at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, the foreseeable future is shaping up to be busy and rewarding for the young mezzo. For the 2017/18 season she is an Associate Artist with Classical Opera Company in London and will be making her debut with them singing Giacinta in Mozart's *La finta semplice* in June 2018. In March-April 2018, she will join Scottish Opera to sing the role of The Composer in its new production of Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* which will also be performed as part of the Holland Park Opera 2018 Summer Season. And later in 2018, she will travel home to Australia to sing the role of Semira in Hasse's *Artaserse* for Pinchgut Opera in November-December. The following season will see her return to Covent Garden and she will also make her debut at the Komische Oper in Berlin.

It's clear that the Begg Award will be put to good use in helping Emily prepare for these and other exciting career opportunities on the horizon. Congratulations Emily – we look forward to sharing the journey with you!

PAST RECIPIENTS OF THE DAME HEATHER BEGG MEMORIAL AWARD



Jeremy Kleeman, Baritone (2016)

In August this year, I sang the role of Collatinus in Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, a co-production between Sydney Chamber Opera and Victorian Opera. This work is notoriously difficult to present, though challenging and rewarding, and exactly the kind of thought-provoking and intensely considered art that I want to be involved in creating. In presenting dramatic stories of this kind, one is faced with massive vocal challenges which require constant work and refinement to do them justice. Thanks to the Begg Award, I was able to take time away from performing last year to focus on studying vocal technique with some of the best teachers overseas. My three-month study trip focussed mainly on Italy and New York, where I worked with teachers including Stelia Doz, Sherman Lowe, David Jones and Neil Semer. Since then I have been regularly working with Neil Semer on Skype (and in person when he visited Australia) and with Raymond Lawrence in Melbourne.

Along with the Britten project, I have maintained a very busy schedule this year. I performed the roles of Badger and Priest in Janáček's *Cunning Little Vixen* with Victorian Opera, premiered a new work *Double*

Happiness by Hong Kong composer Hin-Yang Chan at the Canberra International Music Festival, was Bass Soloist in Bach's *St John Passion* with Melbourne Bach Choir at the Melbourne Recital Centre and sang in three large outdoor events. I am now preparing for a role debut in Monteverdi's *Coronation of Poppea* with Pinchgut Opera later this year, along with other events and auditions. My ongoing intense technical study enabled by the Begg Award has made such an intense schedule possible. I also have plans to study language and audition in Germany later this year with the award's support. The Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award continues to make a profound difference and I am incredibly grateful.



Amina Edris, Soprano (2015)

I am currently nearing the end of my two-year residency with the Adler Fellowship Program for young artists with the San Francisco Opera and look forward to a variety of performance and competition opportunities. I am approaching my final assignment with bittersweet emotions as I take on the cover of the title role of Massenet's *Manon*, an opera that I love so dearly, but I'm also saying goodbye to this program shortly after the season ends in December. It has been such a fulfilling journey for me and an incredible learning experience. Although I am fortunate enough to be part of a paid young artist program, there are so many added expenses for things that are crucial for career development that many young singers are not able to afford. The Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award has helped me tremendously during my time in San Francisco, allowing me to have the freedom to travel for auditions, competitions, add extra coachings and lessons, all without financial stress. I am forever grateful to have been a recipient of this award and to have had the ability to pursue many opportunities that would otherwise not have been possible.



Janet Todd, Soprano (2014)

I remain extremely thankful for the generosity of the Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award which contributed to my studies at the Manhattan School of Music in New York where I completed my Master of Music degree over two years. The education I received there was absolutely world class with some of the most sought-after teachers

and coaches available at the school. There were regular, wonderful performance opportunities, as well as incredible artists coming to give master classes which I could both observe and take part in. A highlight was being selected to sing in a live broadcast of a masterclass with American baritone Thomas Hampson. Alongside working with my teachers at MSM, I was able to work with other coaches around the city and broadened my network throughout New York and the USA.

I have since been engaged in concert and opera work throughout New York City, as well as continuing to study with teachers, refining my craft, auditioning and developing my operatic career here in the USA. Naturally I have enjoyed returning to Australia at least once a year to perform. I sang in Handel's *Hercules* for the Canberra Choral Society in 2015, in Pinchgut Opera's production of Haydn's *Armida* in 2016 and in October I will return to sing the title role in Handel's *Esther* in Canberra for Tobias Cole's 'Handel in the Theatre'.



Samuel Dundas, Baritone (2013)

The Heather Begg Memorial Award was instrumental in enabling me to go overseas to study. Often scholarships are geared towards younger, developing singers, so to be supported as an older, professional, developing singer was a great opportunity. I studied Italian in Sicily, worked with renowned Italian teachers in Verona and Bologna and then studied with Yvonne Kenny AM and conductor Richard Hetherington in London. Then in 2015 I studied in Berlin, learning German and coaching with Australian conductor Nicholas Carter.

Since returning to Australia, I've been very busy. Highlights in 2016 included playing the role of Marcello in Puccini's *La bohème* in the Hennessy series at Vietnam's Hanoi Opera House, which is a miniature version of the Palais Garnier in Paris! I also sang Papageno in Mozart's *The Magic Flute* for the New Zealand Opera, and the Reporter in Watkins and John's *Sydney Opera House – the Opera*. This year, I recently performed in 'Opera under the Stars' in Broome, played Morales and Le Dancaire in a concert version of Bizet's *Carmen* in Hobart, sang Harašta in Victorian Opera's production of Janáček's *Cunning Little Vixen* and was Silvio in Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* for Opera Australia. And among other engagements for 2018, I'll take on the role of Prosdócimo in OA's production of Rossini's *The Turk in Italy* and will sing Marcello again in the Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour production of *La bohème*.

I remain deeply grateful for Heather Begg's legacy and to have been deemed worthy of this generous Award.



Scholars Damian Arnold and Bronwyn Douglass working with Yvonne Kenny AM

INTO THE SACRED SPACE

“Performing in master class is the perfect way to bridge the gap of understanding between a singer and the public. It is a unique opportunity to get a glimpse of the detailed work that goes into preparing music for performance that would normally happen behind closed doors. Trusting your audience and daring to get things wrong in the quest to better oneself can be extremely rewarding for the singer and exciting for the audience.” - Bronwyn Douglass

At Melba Opera Trust we consider our donors to be the unsung heroes of the program and we enjoy creating memorable behind-the-scenes experiences to demonstrate the impact our heroes are making.

One such occasion was a recent master class in Sydney conducted by celebrated Australian soprano Yvonne Kenny AM with Sharolyn Kimmorley AM at the piano.

Generously hosted by Josephine Sukkar AM and Tony Sukkar AM in their home in Bellevue Hill, an intimate group of Sydney supporters were invited to observe the ‘sacred space’ of a master class, with three Melba scholars, Bronwyn Douglass, Daniel Carison and Damian Arnold, intensively refining their arias with Yvonne.

Melba supporter Diane Morris has attended several Melba events, and always finds it “wonderful to be transported away by such beautiful performances in a more intimate setting”. But this was her first opportunity to attend a master class and she found the process fascinating. Yvonne was “truly sparkling in her presence, yet so focused on each scholar’s performance and personality, imparting many practical and memorable techniques. Sitting there in the audience”, Diane adds, “one

couldn’t help taking on Yvonne’s advice and we found ourselves sitting taller, relaxing the jaw, breathing into the belly, tipping the head forward slightly to open up the larynx, projecting our smiles through our cheeks and settling our posture through the pelvis and heels!”

Being critiqued publicly is a challenging prospect for anyone and second-time scholar Bronwyn Douglass suggests that singing in master classes “can be more daunting than live performance in many ways, because you are performing arias you are still working on and even if you take a work you’re confident with, you fully expect it to be picked apart by the teacher”. However, she also acknowledges that “it is a very valuable exercise for both singers and audience”. The experience can also be “encouraging for singers and obviously intriguing for supporters to get an insight into the potential of the young singers, and of what goes

into trying to reach that potential.”

As Melba supporter and master class attendee Suzanne Maple-Brown points out, “it must be very difficult to receive criticism in front of an audience, but witnessing the suggestions of ways to achieve a better outcome, the singers’ attitudes and their corrections is enlightening – it does help one understand this craft and highlights the depth of skills required to achieve a successful performance”. And as Diane notes, “Yvonne’s ability to deftly hone in on the mechanics of each voice, as well as convey the nuances demanded by the inflexions of each language, was remarkable and her critique was delivered in a positive manner, making it easier for the scholars to accept each suggestion with the poise that they did. Is there such grace and humility in the corporate world?” she wonders!

With so much learning and insight,

these events would not be complete without the chance to chat with the singers and mentor over a delicious glass of De Bortoli wine. “A highlight at the end of each Melba event is mingling with the scholars to soak up their infections, youthful enthusiasm for their craft and to hear about the planned next steps in their careers”, says Diane. “I particularly enjoy charting how much the repeat scholars continue to grow in their performance and their constant gratitude for the support of the ‘Melba family’.”

Along the same vein, in October members of the Joscelyne community will have a glimpse into the realm of the singing studio, as Bronwyn works with her teacher, esteemed tenor Glenn Winslade in an open singing lesson.

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De BORTOLI
FAMILY WINEMAKERS

A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

We have a fond saying at Melba Opera Trust: “Once a Melba, always a Melba”. It may read as a lofty sentiment, but our approach deliberately intends to nurture a vibrant and valuable community which supports our scholars and everyone that is involved. We think it is a unique strength and one that we cherish.

The precious threads that weave the fabric of our community is what makes it so special. Our singers build a network of peers, but also learn from interacting with Melba alumni who are further along the journey. Melba alumni begin to adopt the role of mentor, an aspect that they relished when they were scholars themselves. Our experienced mentors have years of wisdom that they are eager to share with eager young scholars and are engaged to ‘give back’. And, of course, our supporters who not only provide generous financial aid, but enthusiastically invest their time, interest and delight in observing and helping the development of our scholars.

This sense of Melba community has been highlighted through two recent Melba events: a performance of *Nights at the Opera* in the Salon of the Melbourne Recital Centre and the annual Opera Night of the Australian Club.

Nights at the Opera is a program of entertaining anecdotes recounted by eminent Australian pianist

and narrator Stephen McIntyre and complemented by musical highlights. In July, the MRC performance featured alumni Morgan Balfour (soprano) and Matthew Reardon (tenor), together with current scholar Daniel Carison (baritone). At the piano was repetiteur Jonathan Wilson, our Margaret Schofield Opera Scholarship recipient for the second year in a row. He commented that it was “an absolute pleasure to perform with Melba alumni and a current scholar” for this occasion. “I think it’s very important for scholars past and present to work together”, Jonathan said, ‘because it forges professional and personal relationships that will be most useful into the future, particularly as we continue to make inroads into the profession. This sense of community is sometimes lacking in an industry that places such intense demands on those who take part in it.”

For Morgan, it was a welcome opportunity to work with Daniel again. They were scholars together in Daniel’s first year (2015) “it was really fun to slip back into our Mozart partnership to perform ‘Crudel, perchè finora’ from *Le nozze di Figaro*”, she said. She also appreciated the chance to catch up with her “wonderful friend and colleague Matthew” and especially enjoyed hearing him sing with Daniel the duet ‘Au fond du temple saint’ from Bizet’s *The Pearlfishers*. Though she’d not met Jonathan before, she “really admired his dedication

to getting everything right, and his attention to detail”. Morgan added, “And to cap it all off, having the fabulous Melba community there to support us made it even more enjoyable. I felt very fortunate to have taken part in the evening”.

Morgan has just started the final year of her Master’s degree in Opera at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music studying with César Ulloa and has been cast as Rodelinda in Handel’s *Rodelinda* and as Ortensia/Ettalina in Musto’s *Bastianello*. She is also busy preparing for upcoming external auditions, so it will be a full year for her. However, having held the Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship in 2015, she still finds time to keep in touch with Mary-Jane Joscelyne, whom Morgan acknowledges as “one of the most amazing ladies I’ve ever met! One of the best things about Melba Opera Trust is that as scholars, you are introduced to the incredible people who have enabled you to be part of the program”. Morgan and Mary-Jane keep in regular contact, and Mary-Jane attends every concert she can. “She was even the first person to call me on my birthday this year!” exclaimed Morgan.

The annual Opera Night at The Australian Club demonstrated the full extent of Melba community, with many donors attending to enjoy performances by current scholar Damian Arnold (tenor) with alumna Stacey Alleaume (soprano) alongside Melba mentors and

renowned Australian opera singers, soprano Cheryl Barker AO and baritone Peter Coleman-Wright AO. To fully complete the ensemble, the performance was expertly accompanied on piano by Melba’s very own Artistic Advisor, Sharolyn Kimmorley AM.

Peter understands well the value of young artists having a variety of opportunities to learn from their more experienced colleagues:

I remember my own beginnings. Being able to study with the late Sir Peter Pears CBE (English tenor) and the late Sir Geraint Evans (Welsh bass-baritone) directed me to a complete network of artists I might never otherwise have had the chance to see and hear. As a young performer at Covent Garden standing alongside some of these great singers makes one ‘raise the game’, so to speak. Forming teaching and mentoring relationships with highly-experienced artists is vital. Young artists should work alongside those who have trodden the boards and know what they are talking about: how to pace oneself in performance, deal with directors and conductors, get through performances when one is not in top form and deal with stress and pressure.

As a first-year scholar, Damian Arnold experienced the event as a “unique performance opportunity to be able to sing alongside rising star Stacey Alleaume and Australian opera royalty Peter Coleman-Wright and Cheryl Barker”. He found singing

duets with Stacey “motivating and uplifting” and “an experience to cherish”. And then to be able to watch Cheryl and Peter sing a complete scene from Puccini’s *Tosca* made him even more inspired “Having the opportunity to work with artists who are further along their respective journeys really motivates me to work on my craft. I got the sense it was also an interesting experience for the audience to see a current scholar, an alumna and two Melba mentors sharing the stage.”

Stacey Alleaume echoed the sentiments of Peter and Damian, recognising that the experience of performing with professional singers when she was younger “encouraged me to want to excel further and gave me inspiration, as well as goals and direction – it still has the same effect!”

Stacey’s hope that one day she can be “as inspirational as past mentors have been to me”, is already happening, it seems. She has been involved in the now more frequent industry chats between alumni and current scholars being included in the Mentor Program in 2017. “Sharing knowledge is so important”, she stressed. ‘We Melba alumni have had the opportunity to work or study with some of the world’s most acclaimed professionals, and it is a duty to pass on information and experience we’ve learned along the way to the new generation of performers – this is how the art form continues to improve in all facets.’



Image above LtoR: Jonathan Wilson, Morgan Balfour, Daniel Carison, Matthew Reardon

BEING MELBA

In a serendipitous twist, earlier this year esteemed Australian soprano Emma Matthews found herself mentoring our Melba scholars whilst herself preparing to 'be' the great Dame in a new musical production, *Melba*.

With a story written by Nicholas Christo based on Ann Blainey's biography *I am Melba* and music by Johannes Luebbers, *Melba* enjoyed a very successful, extended season in August/September at the intimate Hayes Theatre in Sydney. Cast in the role of the mature aged Melba, Emma was elated when we spoke to her during the run. "I wake up tired, but excited that I'm on again tonight – it's a great feeling, and a huge honour. The whole thing's a joy!" That she gets to play a character her own age is an added challenge and a bonus. "I'm used to being 18 on stage, twirling around and having that youthful energy, but I'm having to give myself more grandness and posture to show I'm the diva!"

The show is an interesting blend of musical theatre and opera, with Annie Aitken singing and acting the role of the younger Melba, and Emma singing the operatic arias that Melba herself often performed "You get a kind of stereo effect of a person. When Annie is talking, I might be sitting in a chair just remembering. For example, there's a scene where Melba is breaking up with the great love of her life, Philippe d'Orléans (exiled pretender to the French throne), and I sit there reflecting with a sense of regret, but knowing I did the right thing and then I get up to sing...the arias interweave very cleverly with the action, a bit like a jigsaw puzzle."

Reading several books about Melba over the years has helped Emma

to understand Melba's character as a "gracious, incredible, fiery woman", as well as her challenges and vulnerabilities. This led Emma to respect the Dame greatly for her determination and ambition in having developed such an impressive career as a woman in an era when this was unusual. "The situation with her husband, losing her son for so long and the stigma of being a working mum in that day and age must have been awful. She was apparently 'booed' by the audience during a performance of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* and accused of being a terrible mother – her life was so public!" Melba also had an impact on Emma much earlier in her career through the mini-series *Melba* starring Yvonne Kenny AM. Before watching this, the young singer hadn't realised it was possible to have an operatic career and was more interested in musical theatre. Melba was "a real inspiration to me as someone who travelled the world and had a wonderful life as a classical singer".

With this background knowledge in place, Emma particularly focused on the star's singing and ornamentation in preparing for this role, a process she found intriguing. "Melba would do a beautiful cadenza that expressed the mood. She didn't tend to sing a lot of top notes because it was considered indulgent and distasteful, so I'm using some of her cadenzas and some of my own." Judging by reviews of the show, Emma's singing had a great impact, with one critic saying he was "strangely aware of the fillings in my teeth – such is the vocal power of soprano Emma Matthews".

It seems as if this role was made for Emma, particularly since she has sung similar repertoire to Melba and notes similarities in their voices. While it is not always easy to tell

from old recordings, Emma points out that it is possible to hear the line in Melba's interpretations. "Certainly when Melba performs the 'Vissi d'arte' aria from Puccini's *Tosca*, she sings it very cleanly, with minimal portamento. Very different to the way bigger voices sing it now." And Melba worked with Puccini, "so he must have liked what she was doing!" said Emma, who particularly enjoyed singing this aria, as *Tosca* is not a role she had taken on before.

The connections between Melba and Matthews do not end there. As was Melba, Emma was trained in the vocal technique devised by German mezzo-soprano and singing teacher Mathilde Marchesi. "In fact my teacher's teacher's teacher was Nellie Melba and now I teach the technique myself to my private students", Emma notes.

With her recent appointment as Head of Classical Voice at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) from 2018, Emma plans to formalise the Marchesi technique as the language for WAAPA singing students to learn. This new role represents an exciting development in Emma's career as she is "very passionate about teaching, which I love as much as singing. It gives me as much joy to share what I've learned and to see a young singer blossom as it does for me to sing on stage. I hope I can make a difference." A sentiment also shared with Dame Nellie Melba who

was celebrated for her mentoring and support of young proteges.

Melba scholars benefitted from Emma's love of teaching in a master class earlier this year, generously hosted by Deputy Chair, Kate Shelmerdine, at Cranlana. "I loved the day and I love what Melba scholars have" said Emma. "It's such an important program in grooming and polishing young singers before they go into industry and I'm thrilled to be associated with it."



Emma Matthews as 'Melba'



Alumna Shakira Tsindos with Emma Matthews



Damian Arnold with Emma Matthews

THIRD TIME'S A CHARM

Soprano Zoe Drummond is completing her third year as a Melba Scholar, having held the Dame Nellie Melba Opera Scholarship and Patrick & Vivian Gordon Award since 2015. As she embarks on further study overseas, we asked her to reflect on her time with Melba Opera Trust.

What experiences have you had in your three years as a scholar that have particularly helped shape or complement your journey, both personally and professionally?

Personally, I have so much to thank Melba Opera Trust for. I feel as though I have hit the jackpot each year in terms of my cohort of fellow scholars. Everyone has been so kind, motivated and talented, and I've made many lifelong friends through the program. I think one of the reasons singing is such a wonderfully strange career is that as soon as you meet someone new, you have to become very comfortable very quickly in order to work together. Working in the theatre not only requires you to be very open and giving, but also to have an acute awareness of your own personality and aura. Melba Opera Trust combines our real-life/real-time scholar relationships with specific mentor training in 'people and self-skills', such as performance anxiety, negotiation, wellbeing and goal-setting. I have learnt so much about myself and feel like I have both the tools and knowledge to make the most of situations.

As an interstate scholar, the time I spent in Melbourne during the Mentor Blocks was an absolute blessing. I tried to organise all my administrative tasks before I left Sydney, so that my time in Melbourne could be focused totally on Melba Opera Trust. This included making sure I was always prepared for sessions and had researched the necessary topics – and mentors! It also enabled me to schedule some 'off' time to lounge about and enjoy some mental and vocal rest to be fresh and switched on for the next day.

The three years spent travelling between two cities also gave me some insight into what it is like to live as a touring artist – looking after my vocal health while flying, sorting out the logistics of living out of a suitcase (particularly having 'crease-proof' performance wear), and how to make dinner using minimal appliances!

On a more personal note – after moving to Sydney from Melbourne for my undergraduate degree, I sadly saw a lot less of my family who live in Ballarat. My Melba commitments made it possible to see my sisters and parents more regularly and for them to attend many performances, which was wonderful.

The support of the people involved with Melba Opera Trust – both mentors and staff – has been incredible. I have been fortunate to have regular contact with Sharolyn Kimmorley AM, who guides, counsels and teaches me in world-class standards. And the Melba staff have always been willing to assist with any questions or issues. It has been reassuring to have a well-informed, well-connected team on my side. One of the mottos of the Trust is 'Once a Melba, always a Melba', and this certainly rings true. There is a sense of camaraderie that connects the alumni, and everywhere I have travelled I have been welcomed with open arms and flooded with advice and kindness.

Over my three years, I was involved in many Melba Artist gigs – in churches, board rooms, mansions, lounge rooms, recital halls and even in the snow. Having a constant stream of varied work consolidated a long repertoire list of opera 'hits', which will be used time and time again. It also instilled a productive practice ethic, confidence to talk on stage (and mingle afterwards), and to have a good rapport with pianists and fellow singers.

It's likely that each year delivered a different experience based on where you were personally and artistically. Could you describe your experience of this?

When I was first accepted as a Melba scholar in late 2014 for the 2015 intake, I was awestruck and

incredibly excited. I had just finished my honour's thesis, had performed my final university recital and had no idea what to do next. Melba came at a time when I felt I was a competent singer and performer, but I wasn't quite sure how to progress into being the artist I strived to be. During the first year, I was shown the numerous facets that make up this profession, and I was given information and tools about how to advance in these areas. The program teaches you everything you didn't know you needed to know.

I wasn't necessarily overwhelmed... but I did approach each 'subject' quite academically. Looking back now, I feel my first year as a scholar was like going over my life with a fine-tooth comb – really looking at my strengths and weaknesses, and exploring the resources available. I learnt so much that year, both personally and professionally – and my concert repertoire list doubled in size.

This time to learn and self-reflect stood me in incredible stead for my second year with the Trust, when I began to put these skills into practice and fill any gaps in my development. A musical change for me was that I decided to focus on roles in which I could be cast early in my career, such as the soubrette Mozart characters. It was particularly interesting to sing for artists such as Daria Masiero one year, and then again the next, and to receive feedback on my progress.

I also enjoyed considerable success in the Australian competition circuit during my second year, performing as a finalist and winning numerous awards, notably the Lady Fairfax New York Scholarship from the Opera Foundation for Young Australians.

During this third year, I had less face-to-face time at the Trust but made the most of my scholarship funds for private artistic development – focused and intensive, self-devised learning periods to prepare thoroughly for external professional engagements and auditions. It has been a very busy year professionally for me, so I have really appreciated Melba's access to the best coaches and teachers to see as often as I

needed. The freedom towards my artistic development is something I will never take for granted.

Another highlight of my third year was to visit Melba's cottage and estate, Coombe and to sing for her great great granddaughter, The Hon. Saffron Foster. A beautiful way to feel connected and pay respects to the woman herself.

How has the transition between being a Melba scholar and paid professional been so far?

Very smooth! At the beginning of my time with Melba most of my performance opportunities came from the Melba Artists performance program with a few external commitments. But by the end of my three years I was employed as a full-time singer. My Melba training has aided every performance.

Where to from here?

For a new chapter of my singing career, in September I moved to London to commence my scholarship for the Master of Opera Performance at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. I'll be studying with Melba Mentor Yvonne Kenny AM! Before the end of this year, I'll also travel to New York for a month-long study trip thanks to the Lady Fairfax New York Scholarship that I won last year from Opera Foundation for Young Australians.

What productions are in store for you, and how you are preparing for these?

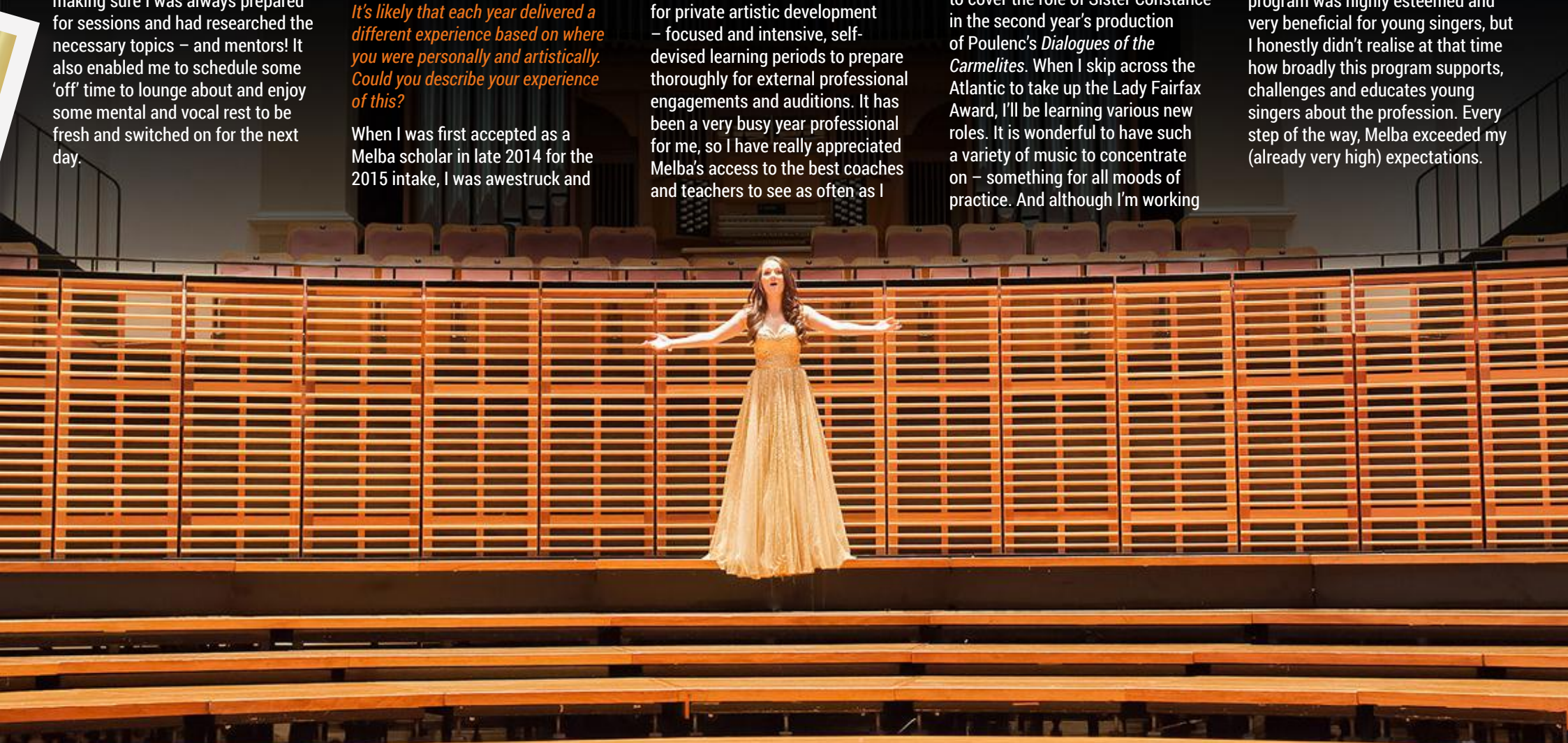
I will be heading back to Sydney at the end of September to resume my contract with Opera Australia on the 'fun' production of *Two Weddings, One Bride* at the Sydney Opera House and this time I'll be performing the role of the bride (Giroflé/Girofla) for the entire season. After this, I return to London to continue studies at the Guildhall, will sing in a concert of opera scenes (I am involved in *Hamlet* and *Idomeneo*) and to begin to cover the role of Sister Constance in the second year's production of Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites*. When I skip across the Atlantic to take up the Lady Fairfax Award, I'll be learning various new roles. It is wonderful to have such a variety of music to concentrate on – something for all moods of practice. And although I'm working

very hard at the moment, it feels a little like the calm before the storm.

Each of these forthcoming adventures requires significant preparation. Probably the best way to demonstrate the impact of the Melba program is for me to give you an insight into how I prepare. Today, for example, I wrote out the text of a scene for Guildhall and marked it up in the style of language coach Teresa Desmarchelier. I then deconstructed the dramatic action according to what I learnt from Chuck Hudson and Lindy Hume. After scanning the Castel IPA on my iPad (technology skills courtesy of Sharolyn Kimmorley), I made my way to the practice room and, once I'd set some goals (Time Management), including delegating rest time (Vocal Health), I pieced together information from all the Trust's amazing singing professionals and applied this to my new music. After my practice, I sent a few professional emails (Negotiating) and arranged a time to Skype with my German language tutor (Artist Development Program). Then I got ready to go to a function (hopefully, Style!) where I was introduced to many new industry people (Protocol and Etiquette, Networking). It is incredible how these skills filter into every aspect of our lives – and this was a day with no actual performing!

And finally, have there been any unexpected opportunities that have proven especially rewarding?

Before being a Melba scholar, I never thought I'd be singing for some of the world's most talented performers: Renée Fleming, Yvonne Kenny AM, Daria Masiero, The Dame Felicity Lott, Simon O'Neill, Peter Coleman-Wright, Deborah Humble and most importantly, the incredible Sharolyn Kimmorley AM! I believe my entire Melba experience has been unexpected and especially rewarding. I always knew the program was highly esteemed and very beneficial for young singers, but I honestly didn't realise at that time how broadly this program supports, challenges and educates young singers about the profession. Every step of the way, Melba exceeded my (already very high) expectations.



LETTER FROM ABROAD: JADE MOFFAT

Jade was the recipient of the Dame Nellie Melba Scholarship and the Patrick & Vivian Gordon Award (2013 & 2014)

Hello Everyone!

It's lovely to be able to write to you from London where I've just finished a wonderful and challenging two years at Guildhall School of Music and Drama in the opera course, working with Yvonne Kenny AM. The time has really flown by and I feel incredibly privileged to have had this opportunity. Since moving to London I have learnt and grown so much as a young musician, as well as adding quite a few important roles to my CV.

My final role as part of the course was Zenobia in Handel's *Radamisto* and I adored working on some baroque repertoire after a year of singing predominantly new and contemporary opera. Once *Radamisto* closed, I headed north to Congleton where I sang Marcellina in *Le nozze di Figaro* for Clonter Opera. It was a whirlwind process because

we only had 10 days in total to stage and rehearse before opening night! But the incredible energy that everyone brought made it a great success.

As I write this I am preparing to go on tour with Glyndebourne Festival Opera, singing in the chorus for Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and, most excitingly, for *Hamlet*, a brand new opera written by Australian composer Brett Dean. We will be travelling to Canterbury, Woking, Norwich and Milton Keynes where I look forward to making the most of being in the countryside!

I am also really looking forward to making my Wigmore Hall recital debut in October with Independent Opera, where I will be singing a lovely selection of Brahms Lieder and a couple of cheeky Kurt Weill songs.

Recently I found out that I've been fortunate enough to be selected as a Samling Artist for 2018 which includes heading to Cumbria in February for an intensive week of coachings and master classes,

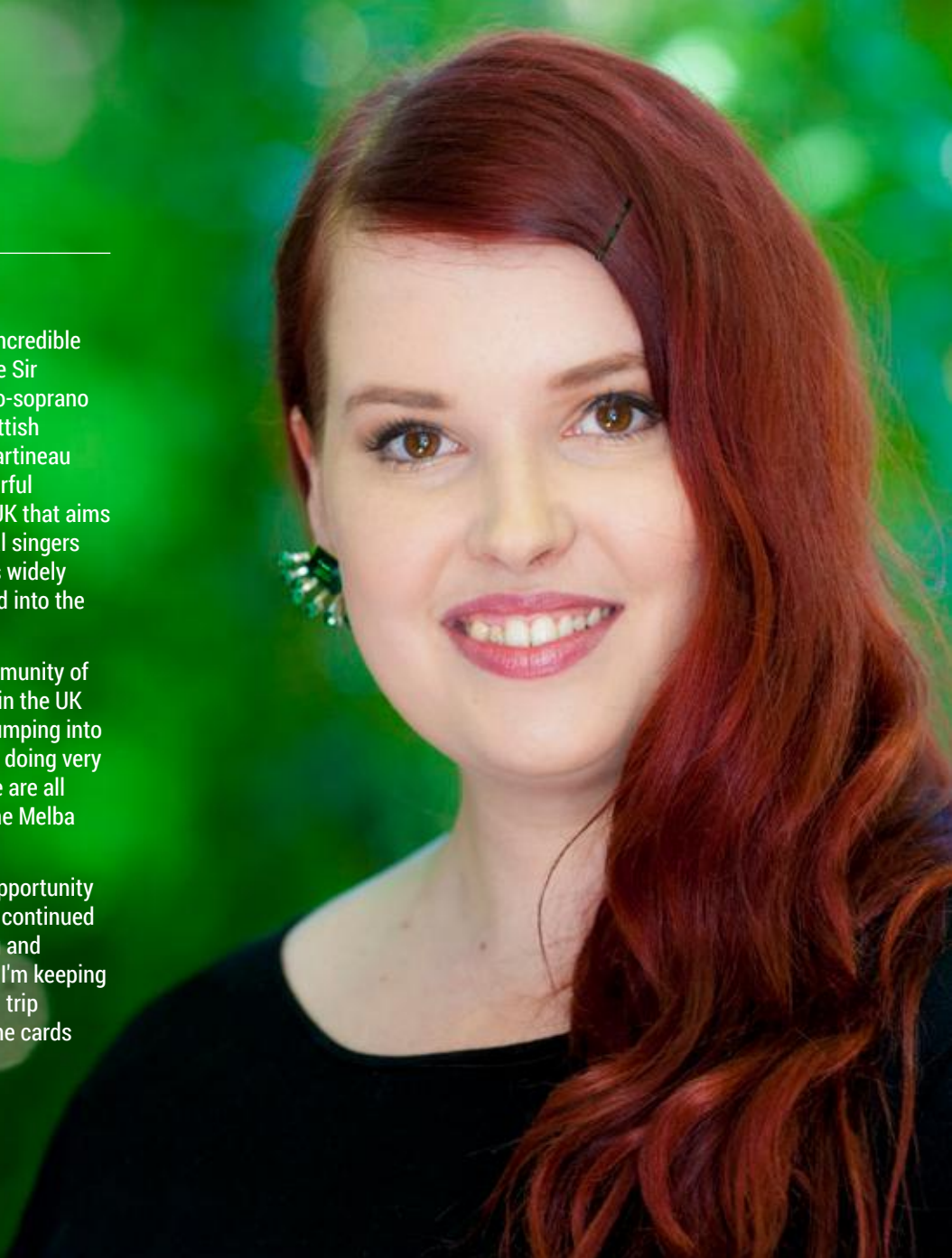
working with a group of incredible leaders including baritone Sir Thomas Allen CBE, mezzo-soprano Ann Murray DBE and Scottish accompanist Malcolm Martineau OBE. Samling is a wonderful organisation here in the UK that aims to nurture young classical singers and accompanists, and is widely regarded as a springboard into the operatic profession.

There is a wonderful community of Aussie singers over here in the UK and I find myself often bumping into fellow Melbas who are all doing very exciting things. I think we are all so lucky to be a part of the Melba family!

I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you for your continued interest in my performing and progress here in London. I'm keeping my fingers crossed that a trip home to Australia is on the cards sometime next year.

All my love,

Jade X



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