

MELBA ALUM AT COVENT GARDEN

SCIENCE & SINGING: THE JOSEPH
SAMBROOK OPERA SCHOLARSHIP

ANNOUNCING THE
DAME HEATHER BEGG AWARD



The Melba

CONTENTS

Page 2

- A note from the General Manager
- About the Melba Opera Trust
- 2014 Melba Scholars

Page 3

- A chance to ‘Meet the Scholars’
- Alexandar Flood
- Opera ‘Salon Style’ in Sydney

Page 4

- Jade Moffat
- Nikki Hill
- Shauntai Batzke
- Rebecca Gulinello

Page 5

- More marvellous mentoring
- Melba Artists snapshot

Page 6 – 7

- The science behind the Joseph Sambrook Opera Scholarship

Page 7

- Brenton Spiteri
- Jeremy Kleeman
- Matthew Reardon

Page 8

- Letters from abroad
- Stefan Cassomenos

Page 9

- Melba takes centre stage at Covent Garden

Page 10 – 11

Dame Heather Begg

- A great legacy at work
- The legacy behind the award
- In her honour...

Page 12

- Master classes: a glimpse behind the curtain



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A NOTE FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER



AFTER SIX SHORT YEARS OF OPERATION MELBA OPERA TRUST IS AUSTRALIA’S PREMIER SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM FOR EMERGING OPERA SINGERS. MORE THAN EVER, OUR PROGRAM IS INSPIRING EXCELLENCE IN ARTISTIC INTEGRITY, ENSURING OUR SINGERS HAVE THE SUPPORT TO REALISE THEIR POTENTIAL AND HELPING THEM TO FORGE THEIR CAREERS AS YOUNG PROFESSIONALS IN A HIGHLY COMPETITIVE INDUSTRY. THROUGH THE STORIES OF OUR SCHOLARS, YOU WILL READ PRECISELY HOW THIS IS BEING ACHIEVED AND THE SUCCESS THAT IS FOLLOWING.

In the forefront of our mind is Dame Nellie Melba’s own conviction, “a beautiful voice is not enough” and through our scholarship funding, business training, mentoring and performance experience we are providing a comprehensive program of preparation for our scholars to become professionals on the world stage.

Already several of our alum are forging international careers, most recently through the announcement that former scholars Lauren Fagan (2011, 2012), Samuel Sakker (2011, 2012) and Samuel Johnson (2013) have all been accepted into the coveted Jette Parker Young Artist Programme at The Royal Opera, Covent Garden. Siobhán Stagg also continues to enjoy great international acclaim, in May making her debut with Hamburg State Opera in their production of *Lear* under the baton of Australia’s own maestro Simone Young.

Adding to this, we were thrilled to learn that former scholar Panayiota Kalatzis (2013) has been announced as the recipient of the Australian International Opera Award and will be relocating to Wales to undertake studies at the Wales International Academy of Voice, former scholar Janet Todd (2010-2012) has been accepted into the Manhattan School of Music where she will complete a Master of Music in opera and former scholar Hannah Dahlenburg (2011, 2012) will commence her Masters of Music on full scholarship at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester.

The number and significance of our singers’ accomplishments in both national and international arenas is as rewarding as it is inspiring. In addition to confirming the effectiveness of our program, collectively these achievements are generating new opportunities for collaboration and support. A shining example is the launch of the inaugural Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award. Joining our current set of scholarships, this annual award will over time become an effective vehicle for extending Melba Opera Trust support to former scholars in the early stages of their professional careers.

WHILE THE EVIDENCE CLEARLY DEMONSTRATES THAT MELBA OPERA TRUST HAS BECOME A SIGNIFICANT LEADER IN THE TRAINING OF YOUNG OPERA SINGERS, THIS HAS BEEN ACHIEVED WITHOUT GOVERNMENT FUNDING. RATHER, THE FINANCIAL UNDERPINNING FOR OUR PROGRAMS COMES FROM OUR GROWING ENDOWMENT.

Last year we successfully raised \$1.5million in donations and forward pledges to the endowment corpus. This included several significant notified legacy gifts, a consequence of our Melba’s Will Bequest Program that was launched late last year. We remain ever grateful to our donors who have helped us to create this unique program and we hope you enjoy reading about the fruits of your support in the pages to follow.

The challenge of financial sustainability remains however, and to establish a capital endowment that will provide for our current suite of programs requires us to raise another \$4 million. As this end of financial year draws closer, I ask all of our Melba community to consider the role you can play in helping us reach this objective. Whether via donation or bequest, the power of an investment in the Melba Opera Trust can be seen through the impressive achievements of our scholars and alum and more immediately through the stories of this magazine. We’re looking forward to delivering more good news as the year – and years – progress!

Amy McPartlan-Black
General Manager

2014 MELBA SCHOLARS

- Dame Nellie Melba Scholarship
Patrick & Vivian Gordon Award
Jade Moffat
- Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship
Rebecca Gulinello
- John & Elizabeth Wright-Smith Scholarship
Brenton Spiteri
- Joseph Sambrook Opera Scholarship
Jeremy Kleeman
- Harold Blair Opera Scholarship
Shauntai Batzke
- Ruskin Opera Award & Mel and Nina Waters Award
Nikki Hill
- RJ Hamer Opera Scholarship
Alexandra Flood
- Margaret Schofield Opera Scholarship & Beleura-Tallis Opera Scholarship
Matthew Reardon

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



A CHANCE TO 'MEET THE SCHOLARS'

IN APRIL THIS YEAR A RECEPTION AND SOIRÉE WAS HELD IN THE GRAND BUT INTIMATE SURROUNDINGS OF THE AUSTRALIAN CLUB. ITS PURPOSE—TO INTRODUCE OUR 2014 MELBA SCHOLARS.

With the exception of third-year Melba scholar Brenton Spiteri (otherwise engaged performing with Opera Australia) all scholars were present and in full voice performing a program of arias accompanied by Melba Trust Associate Repetiteur Stefan Cassomenos.

Following a welcome glass of De Bortoli's *Rococo* sparkling, guests took their seats to learn about the recent achievements of Melba scholars and alumni from Chairman of the Board, Robert G Logie-Smith and General Manager Amy Black.

Speaking on behalf of scholars, the recipient of this year's RJ Hamer Opera Scholarship, Alexandra Flood, articulately addressed the community speaking of her personal journey of development and the role the Melba Opera Trust is playing in realising the next steps of her promising career.

The messages of the evening were further reinforced with an entertaining musical program, demonstrating the vocal prowess of the scholars through Mozart, Verdi, Donizetti, Puccini, Rossini and Catalani. Bernstein and Gershwin provided some lighter moments with the celebratory 'Champagne Chorus' from *Die Fledermaus* marking an ensemble finale.

The festivities continued thanks to the support of our events partners De Bortoli, whose refreshments complemented the enthusiastic conversations being shared by scholars and supporters alike.



ALEXANDRA FLOOD (SOPRANO)

RJ Hamer Opera Scholarship

A private recital for Lady Hamer and her family at her retirement village was one of Alexandra Flood's first performances following being awarded her Melba Trust scholarship in 2014. This unusual and special event was something Alexandra had been looking forward to since discovering that she had been awarded the RJ Hamer Scholarship:

Sir Rupert James Hamer was such a remarkable person who, along with his political and professional achievements, was a leading figure in the arts in Victoria. I was thrilled to find out I was to hold this scholarship, and sent a brief post card to Lady Hamer from Vienna to express my gratitude. When we finally met in person, I experienced Lady Hamer's invigorating enthusiasm for my career. When I said I was 'lucky' to have achieved what I have in my short career, she insisted it was hard work—not luck—that has got me this far. It was a pleasure, and my privilege, to sing for her, and I look forward to a long and meaningful relationship.

Alexandra's 'hard work' is obviously paying off. As well as already having overseas experience singing and

studying in Italy and Austria, she has won a place in the Young Artist Program at the Salzburg Festival this year. This involves a lot of preparation on her part:

I'm sending lots of emails! There are many things to organise—flights, travel plans, insurance, translating contracts—and I'm doing it all myself. But most of the work is in learning the scores, and the Melba Trust's Artistic Advisor, Sharolyn Kimmorley AM, has been very helpful in this regard. She suggested that I first translate the whole work, then learn the notes, and then put the notes to the text. I'm in the middle of this process now with Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, and *Der Rosenkavalier* by Richard Strauss. Of course I'm also learning to speak German!

As if this weren't enough, Alexandra is in throes of organising a concert to be held in St Paul's Cathedral on May 28: I've performed at St Paul's once before, and I loved the welcoming feeling there. The doors are open to passers-by from all walks of life. So with St Paul's blessing, I decided to have my concert there. It's free to attend, as I wanted to give something back to my

supporters, and to this great city which gave me my start. Three colleagues and good friends—Lotte Betts-Dean (mezzo soprano), Jeremy Kleeman (bass-baritone) and Stefan Cassomenos (pianist)—have generously agreed to perform alongside me to help me say a heartfelt 'thanks' and 'farewell' before leaving for Salzburg.

Alexandra maintains that her Melba scholarship has "totally revolutionised" her training and professional development. She is having singing lessons more often, and one-on-one German coaching twice weekly. A performance coach is assisting her to prepare psychologically for upcoming auditions, and a Feldenkrais practitioner is helping her to connect with her support muscles. She sums up her feelings regarding her scholarship as follows:

The Melba Trust has lifted me up from a place of career potential, and located me in a position for professional success.

Alexandra holds a Bachelor of Arts in Art History and Philosophy and a Diploma of Music (Practical) from the University of Melbourne.

OPERA 'SALON STYLE' IN SYDNEY

For several years the Melba Opera Trust has focused on developing a national scholarship program. We are now following suit in our quest for philanthropic support.

Since 2008, 6 of the Trust's 24 scholars have hailed from New South Wales and recently we embarked on some essential 'friend-raising' in Sydney. At our inaugural Sydney event held at 'Elaine' last December, guest Margot, Lady Burrell generously offered her beautiful house and garden, 'Rosemont' in Woollahra, for a future occasion. The date of Sunday, 23 March was set, and Sydney based alumni and scholars were engaged to perform to a distinguished group of opera lovers and supporters. Alumna Stacey Alleaume (soprano) together with current scholars Jade Moffat (mezzo soprano) and Matthew Reardon (tenor) gave an intimate performance that was reminiscent of the nineteenth-century European 'salon'. Artistic Advisor and Vocal Coach Sharolyn Kimmorley AM accompanied the singers, performing on a Steinway especially provided for the event by Ari and Nyree Vartoukian of Theme and Variations.



Melba Trust Managing Director Peter Garnick opened proceedings, providing an outline of the Melba Opera Trust's Program and its mission to support promising young opera singers' artistic and professional development. The talent of our scholars was then tangibly demonstrated through a superb musical program featuring Mozart, Puccini, Rossini, Bizet, Zandonai and Kálmán.

To close the formalities Melba Opera Trust Chair Robert Logie-Smith addressed the audience, "Today we are friend-raising. That's not to say we don't need donations – on the contrary donations from individuals and philanthropic organisations are what makes our Program possible", he said, "but we would like you to first know who we are, understand what we do and experience first-hand the opportunities our program is creating for these exceptional young artists".

On that note, guests adjourned to enjoy wonderful refreshments provided and generously sponsored by event partners Katering and De Bortoli. Armed with glasses of De Bortoli's 'Melba' range of wines, guests mingled with the artists amidst the backdrop of Rosemont's gorgeous garden.

We're pleased to report that some of our new Sydney friends have decided to provide support following this event. Others interested should contact Amy Black on 0414 434-884, or visit our website at <http://www.melbaoperatrust.com.au/support/>. We look forward to welcoming you to the 'Melba family'!



SCHOLARS



JADE MOFFAT (MEZZO SOPRANO)

Dame Nellie Melba Scholarship Patrick and Vivian Gordon Award

Jade Moffat was already a member of Opera Queensland’s Developing Artist Program while a student at the Queensland Conservatorium. To further her opera-singing career, she made the important decision to re-locate to Sydney, which she did in January this year. While she misses her partner, who remained in Brisbane for work reasons, Jade is relishing the opportunities Sydney is providing:

“I made the move in order to take up contracts offered to me by Opera Australia, and also to give myself the opportunity to work with Sydney’s wonderful coaches and teachers. So far it’s going wonderfully, as Sydney has so much to offer its young singers.”

As part of her engagement with Opera Australia, Jade sang in the recent Handa Opera on the Harbour performances of Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*, which she found extremely rewarding:

“It’s not every day that you get to go to work and watch the sun set over the Harbour Bridge and the Opera House, have fireworks and a speed boat as part of the set, and sit in a poncho backstage when it’s pouring rain!”

Jade performed as one of five geishas in the chorus, but she also covered the role of Kate Pinkerton:

“We wore gorgeous contemporary-style kimonos designed by Opera Australia Costume Designer Lluc Castells, and full geisha make-up that took more than an hour to apply every evening! It was also fantastic to have the opportunity to work with Director Andy Morton on the small but vital part of Kate Pinkerton, even though I didn’t get the chance to go on. *Madama Butterfly* was a really wonderful and unique experience, and I feel so grateful that I had the opportunity to be involved.”

The next major project takes Jade back to Brisbane:

“I’m currently working towards the role of Diane in Philip Glass’s opera *The Perfect American*, and preparations are going very well. I’ve learned the notes, and am now coaching for the part. It’s my debut role with Opera Queensland, and I’m really excited that my first professional engagement in Australia is in my home state!”

Jade is putting her Melba scholarship to very good use, and particularly values the opportunity to design her own program:

“The support offered me through the Melba Opera Trust is enabling me to continue my singing lessons, coaching, language and stagecraft studies this year. My aim is to move abroad in 2015 to further my career, and the Melba Program is assisting me towards presenting myself in the best possible way during my auditions for Young Artist Programs overseas later in 2014. The Program also allows me to work very independently, which I really appreciate. Without the Trust’s generous support, I would have found continuing my studies this year almost impossible.”

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



NIKKI HILL (SOPRANO)

Ruskin Opera Award Mel and Nina Waters Award

The atmosphere in which Nikki Hill grew up may seem at first not to be especially conducive to fostering an aspiration towards opera singing, though she displayed a desire to sing from early on:

“I grew up on a remote cattle property in central Queensland called ‘Tooloombilla,’ owned by my family since 1969. I learnt to ride a horse when I was 3, and was regularly heard singing on my pony while helping with the cattle work. I studied through the Charleville School of Distance Education and also participated via high-frequency (HF) radio in weekly choir and recorder classes. My class consisted of students living on remote cattle or sheep stations within a radius of around 600km.”

In spite of coming from a family who knew little about music and opera, Nikki found ways to further her musical development:

“I entered and won my first eisteddfod in Charleville at the age of 9, singing ‘I Still Call Australia Home’ accompanied by a cassette tape! Then in 2002, I started boarding at the Toowoomba Preparatory School, having won a choral scholarship to sing in the chapel choir. It seems hard to believe now, but I was very shy, and was terrified of being asked to sing solos!”

Things got more serious when Nikki went to St Margaret’s Anglican Girls’ School as a boarder in 2004, and began singing lessons at the age of 13:

“I developed a passion for musical theatre, aspiring to be the next star in London’s West End. But it wasn’t until four years ago when I began my music degree that I discovered the world of opera. And it was only two years ago that I began to really appreciate this medium. I started studying with dramatic soprano, Lisa Gasteen, who has introduced me to a wide variety of repertoire and helped me gain an in-depth understanding of the industry. I’ve grown to love the operatic art form, and Lisa has inspired me to pursue this path.”

Although they don’t know a lot about opera, Nikki’s family appreciates that she is pursuing something she loves. They are extremely supportive, attending as many of her performances as they can. According to Nikki, “the

hardest thing for them to grasp is the etiquette of clapping. They never quite know when it’s appropriate, and sometimes end up not clapping at all!” She looks forward to an opportunity in the future to return to her local town, Mitchell, and “perform opera in the Town Hall for those I grew up with and who have supported me along the way.”

Nikki feels extremely privileged to be the recipient of the Ruskin Opera Award and the Mel and Nina Waters Award in 2014:

“My experiences so far have exceeded my expectations to say the least! Mentor Program blocks have given me many valuable skills to prepare me for this challenging industry. Highlights so far include master classes and private lessons with Australian soprano Cheryl Barker and Italian soprano Daria Masiero. The chance to perform regularly and work with a wide range of experts is clearly improving my confidence and desire to pursue a career in this industry. I thank the Melba Opera Trust for allowing me to be a part of such a fantastic program and look forward to the rest of the year.”

Nikki holds a Bachelor of Music degree from the Queensland Conservatorium of Music, and is currently undertaking a Postgraduate Certificate of Music Studies at the same institution.



REBECCA GULINELLO (SOPRANO)

Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship

Rebecca Gulinello finds herself in a different position in her second year as a Melba Opera Trust scholar. She is able to benefit from the Mentor Program in new ways and is consolidating her learning. She is also making the most of performance opportunities offered through Melba Artists, having already performed several times in 2014:

“Having so many performance opportunities so far this year has definitely set a good pace for the rest of 2014! I feel more confident now in being sufficiently prepared when many performances are happening at once or in quick succession. Having been through the Melba processes last year, I know what to expect and I find that, when necessary, I can pick myself up and put myself together again technically and emotionally. I can dim the panic button, and work more efficiently and strategically.”

And indeed in one recent Melba Artists engagement, Rebecca displayed her ability to adapt to unusual performing situations. At the third annual ‘Opera in the Arena’ event held in the dressage

arena on the property of Melba Opera Trust benefactors John and Elizabeth Wright-Smith, Rebecca joined with John to sing a duet. This was a performance enjoyed by singers and audience alike!

Rebecca is currently preparing for her professional debut in the role of Simone in Opera Australia’s Schools Program’s tour of *Cinderella* by Gioachino Rossini. While a little frightening at first, Rebecca was ready for the process:

“I needed to have the score memorised and technically sound within a month, which was daunting at first, but I was ready to commit to the challenge. The role is like a dream come true for me, as I couldn’t think of anything better than to tell such a renowned fable through the medium of opera in such an accessible way to young children! I love the innocent, fresh and creative minds kids have, which has inspired the preparation of the character that much more.”

As Rebecca undertakes the rehearsal process for *Cinderella*, she reflects on the ways in which her involvement with the Melba Trust has assisted her:

“Melba has been very supportive of my role with Opera Australia, and I’ve already gained so much from the master classes and mentor blocks thus far. The many stagecraft skills I’ve acquired through Melba’s Program are enabling me to work at a steady pace through the rehearsal period and I feel armed with the background knowledge to support my onstage choices.”

Rebecca holds a Bachelor of Music (Hons) from the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music at the University of Melbourne.



SHAUNTAI BATZKE (SOPRANO)

Harold Blair Opera Scholarship

Performing the role of Old Alice in Deborah Cheetham’s opera *Pecan Summer* for the third time this year, Shauntai is confident she can now bring more depth and maturity to the part. When she first performed it, Shauntai was only one year into her classical training, and is now in her fourth:

“Since my first appearance in *Pecan Summer*, I’ve grown immensely in terms of my musical knowledge

and technique. This year I hope to bring all my training, development, life experience and a deeper sense of understanding to the character of Old Alice.”

As an Indigenous Australian, Shauntai feels passionate about the opera and the story it presents:

“It’s an incredible opportunity to step into the role of such a resilient, strong and wise old aboriginal woman. Alice’s story is one that Indigenous Australians can relate to, and I feel honoured to be able to step into her shoes to tell her story. It’s vital that I give as much effort, value and respect to this character as I can. I must put my whole heart into it; only then can my performance be one of integrity and truth.”

The training she is receiving through her Melba Trust scholarship is something Shauntai is truly relishing. She has enjoyed the coaching she has had through the Mentor Program, has undertaken a beginners’ course in Italian, and plans to continue to take every available opportunity:

“I’ve bathed in the glory of my fellow scholars’ achievements, and have learned so much from their journeys

and performances. I’ve soaked up every mentor session and all the training and support given to me. And all this will certainly enable me to add to my delivery of Old Alice.”

Shauntai urges those who have not yet seen *Pecan Summer* to do so:

“It’s based on a true Australian story that needs to be told. And it’s composed by Australia’s very own Indigenous soprano, Deborah Cheetham, a Yorta Yorta woman who has opened doors for many Indigenous singers to experience opera and to have the chance to be among the next generation of Indigenous opera singers. I can confidently say that I am on that path myself now with the support of Short Black Opera, my voice teacher Rosamund Illing, my family and friends, and the Melba Opera Trust.”

The Harold Blair Opera Scholarship is supported by the Eldon & Anne Foote Trust with the Lord Mayors Charitable Foundation, the Pierce Armstrong Foundation and the Sir Andrew & Lady Fairley Foundation.

Shauntai is in her final year of a Bachelor of Music at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music at the University of Melbourne.

MORE MARVELLOUS MENTORING

THE MENTOR PROGRAM CONTINUES TO EVOLVE AND IS NOW MORE COMPREHENSIVE THAN EVER BEFORE.

This year features several ‘debut’ mentor appearances alongside some favourite ‘encores’. In usual fashion, our national cohort of scholars will descend on Melbourne for seven intensive blocks to refine both their artistic AND professional skill set. Quite aside from the development that takes place during these blocks, our interstate scholars look forward to visiting their ‘home away from home’, staying with our exclusive accommodation partner Mint Melbourne.

Attracting more international mentors to the Program has been a focus for

- Semyon Rozin, an European vocal coach and repetiteur based in Luxembourg, will work intensively with scholars in master class and private coaching;
- Lynne Dawson, acclaimed English soprano and head of voice at Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester presenting a Master Class on English language Art Song
- Professor Michail Lanskoï, a Russian vocal coach and repetiteur based in Austria, and his Australian wife, soprano Alexandra Sherman, will offer a master class and private coaching sessions.

“We are always striving to create a practical program that meets the needs of the singers. When we decide to incorporate new topics it’s because we (or the scholars themselves) have identified a need. We then undertake industry research to engage the most appropriate mentor.”

Organising Mentors has not been Bruce’s only challenge this year:

“The most difficult thing this year has been ensuring that scholars availability and mentor sessions coincide. As scholars develop, so too do their schedules! Whilst it doesn’t make my job any easier, it does demonstrate that our singers are getting work and are out and about putting their craft into professional practice.”

As in previous years, the scholars are as enthused as ever about the Mentor Program activities. First-time scholar Jade Moffat testifies:

“I am so grateful for the opportunities that the Melba Trust has provided over the first three mentor blocks, and I am very excited about what is to come! I really value singing in a master class situation and the combination of following up a master class with private coachings. I also look forward to continuing to learn ‘real-world’ skills valuable to a singer in the music industry, something that is rarely available to students and artists starting out on their career journey.”

The Mentor Program is supported by the Robert Salzer Foundation and Creative Partnerships Australia



Merlyn Quaife AM and Shauntai Batzke

2014, and this is an area that will continue to be developed in future years. Not only does it provide an international standard of expertise, but it aids in developing after scholars international networks and provides for a realistic understanding of the global operatic industry.

This year, international visiting artists include:

- Professor Judy Bellingham from Otago University (New Zealand), retired professional singer and expert in vocal warm up. Judy focuses on preparing the entire body for performance along with the voice;
- Slovenian-born Marko Letonja, Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and Musical Director of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg, presenting a master class on Italian recitative;
- Italian soprano Daria Masiero working in master class on Italian *bel canto*;
- David Aronson, an American vocal coach and senior repetiteur at Vienna State Opera, with his Austrian wife, soprano Silvia Greenberg, working in master class and private coaching on audition repertoire for European opera houses;
- New York theatre director Chuck Hudson will lead a week-long series of drama workshops and coaching sessions;

Naturally our highly-regarded Australian artists also feature prominently in program. Sopranos Merlyn Quaife and Cheryl Barker have already worked with the singers in master classes, with soprano Yvonne Kenny and baritone Teddy Tahu-Rhodes scheduled in the coming months. Baritone Peter Coleman-Wright will present a workshop on Italian recitative, past Opera Australia Artistic Director Moffatt Oxenbould AM will work intensively on character development, and stagecraft/ movement specialist Anna Sweeny will visit us for four days to present an intensive stagecraft module.

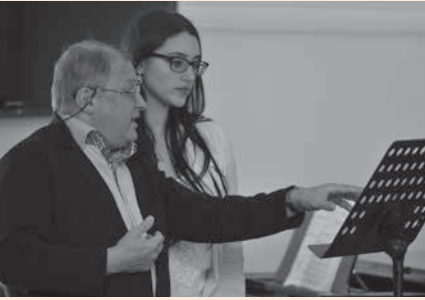
We continue to be grateful to Lady Southey AC, who generally hosts many of our master classes at Cranlana, the magnificent Toorak mansion owned by Melbourne’s preeminent Myer family.

Of course the Trust’s vital professional development workshops remain central to the Program including, among others, networking, negotiation skills, self-promotion, public speaking, media training, personal presentation, vocal health, audition preparation, accounting and legal. This year we are adding to the ‘staple’ sessions with an entree to Alexander technique for posture, performance psychology and general etiquette training.

The comprehensive nature of the program requires a broad and extensive structure that ensure Program Coordinator Bruce Raggatt’s role is always stimulating and challenging:



Yvonne Kenny AM & Matthew Reardon



Semyon Rozin & Rebecca Gulinello



Marko Letonja & Rebecca Gulinello



Matthew Reardon and Stefan Cassomenos

MELBA ARTISTS SNAPSHOT

“IT’S VITAL THAT OUR YOUNG SINGERS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO PERFORM IN AND BECOME FAMILIAR WITH AS WIDE A VARIETY OF PERFORMANCE SETTINGS AS POSSIBLE.”

(JO BEAUMONT: MELBA ARTISTS MANAGER)

Melba Artists provides the performance aspect of the Melba Trust’s Program and has been designed as a vehicle for singers to put their learning into practice.

Melba Artists Manager Jo Beaumont works in conjunction with Program Coordinator Bruce Raggatt and Artistic Advisor Sharolyn Kimmorley AM to source, execute and artistically program a variety of performance opportunities both for external audiences and Melba Opera Trust events.

Performances range from large concerts in metropolitan and regional venues to community events, intimate private gatherings, church services and other special events.

The following is a two-week snapshot into the activities of this busy program—diversity galore!

Thursday 20 March – Opera Society Luncheon at the Swiss Club, Flinders Lane, Melbourne. Melba Artists perform a selection of operatic arias over lunch

Sunday 23 March – Rosemont Estate, Sydney: Alumni and Scholars present an intimate ‘salon’ recital at the beautiful Woollahra home of ‘Rosemont’

Wednesday 26 March – Alphington, Melbourne: RJ Hamer Scholarship holder Alexandra Flood (soprano) gives a private recital for Lady Hamer (26th March) and her family

Thursday 27 March – Cocktail Party, Carousel, Albert Park, Melbourne: Alumna Janet Todd (soprano) and David McNicol (piano) appear as featured artists for Equity Trustees.

Thursday 27 March – Red Cross Fundraising Cocktail Party, Cranlana, Toorak, Melbourne: Melba Artists present an exquisite musical program in support of Red Cross. An evening of glamour and warmth.

Friday 28 and Saturday 29 March – Beleura House and Garden, Mornington, Victoria: Melba Artists present a 90min musical program inspired by the Melba-Williamson opera season of 1924. The performance supports the Beleura-Tallis Opera

Scholarship with the Melba Opera Trust.

Sunday 30 March – ‘Opera in the Wright-Smith Arena’, Yarra Valley, Victoria:

The dressage arena on the property of John and Elizabeth Wright-Smith is transformed into a concert hall for family and friends to enjoy Melba Artists in performance. This year featured a cameo appearance by John Wright-Smith himself, performing a heart warming duet with Rebecca Gulinello.

Sunday 30 March – Bairo Pite Fundraising Event for East Timor, Toorak:

Melba Opera Trust supporter Dr Andrew Cochrane engaged Melba Artists to entertain guests for a fundraising afternoon.

Thursday 3 April – Beleura House and Garden, Mornington:

Alexandra Flood (soprano) and ANAM Faculty Member Timothy Young (piano) perform at the Official Opening of the Grosvenor Room following the official launch by our Patron-In-Chief the Governor of Victoria, His Excellency the Hon Alex Chernov.

Whew—a busy fortnight! There are more gigs on the horizon, including an engagement with the Stonnington Symphony Orchestra, a series of small recitals at St Michael’s Uniting Church in Collins St, Melbourne, and a recital at the Alexandra Club in Melbourne.

If you fancy a visit bayside, scholars will perform their second concert for Bayside City Council on 20th July as part of the *Resonance* concert series, and former scholar Panayiota Kalatzis will be presenting a fundraising recital in preparation for her imminent studies abroad on 2nd August in Blackrock.

For more information visit our website calendar at www.melbaoperatrust.com.au/whats-on/.

Or if you would like to feature Melba Artists at your own special occasion, Jo Beaumont would love to hear from you!

Phone: (03) 9867 4833
Email: artist@melbaoperatrust.com.au

THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE JOSEPH SAMBROOK OPERA SCHOLARSHIP

IN CONVERSATION
WITH JOSEPH
SAMBROOK AND
MARY-JANE
GETHING



LATE LAST YEAR JOSEPH SAMBROOK AND MARY-JANE GETHING CONTACTED THE MELBA OPERA TRUST TO INVESTIGATE ESTABLISHING A FULLY-ENDOWED NAMED SCHOLARSHIP. THIS HAS SINCE BECOME REALITY IN THE FORM OF 'THE JOSEPH SAMBROOK OPERA SCHOLARSHIP', WITH THE INAUGURAL RECIPIENT IN 2014 BEING BASS BARITONE JEREMY KLEEMAN. WE CAUGHT UP WITH THEM RECENTLY TO DISCOVER THE STORY BEHIND THE CREATION OF THE SCHOLARSHIP, AND OF THE PEOPLE WHO SO GENEROUSLY FUND IT.

Both Joe and Mary-Jane have had extremely distinguished careers in the fields of biochemistry and molecular biology. After many years working in research institutes in England and America, Liverpool-born Joe and English-born but Australian-bred Mary-Jane took up positions in Australia, Joe as Director of Research at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in Melbourne, and Mary-Jane as Professor and later Head of the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at the University of Melbourne. They are both now retired.

I know there are many, but I wondered if there were any research projects in particular that you would like to tell us about?

Mary-Jane: One that stands out in this context is the project that made it possible for us to fund this scholarship, since neither of us started off with great sums of money. We started a project in the famous Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory on Long Island near New York on an enzyme involved in dissolving blood clots in the body. It was in the early days of recombinant DNA and molecular cloning, so it was quite a difficult project, but it worked in the end. And then we moved to Texas to the Southwestern Medical School in Dallas and were fortunate to have an amazing group of people come and work with us.

Joe: It was a collaboration of five scientists, each of whom brought a different set of skills to the project, which took several years. The artificial enzyme we developed in Dallas has saved many thousands of lives, which

is a good feeling. But it also made some money, since the University of Texas licensed our discovery to Genentech, who were already making the natural protein on which ours was an improvement. It's really those royalty payments that have enabled us to fund things like this scholarship.

And how did you find out about the possibility of donating to the Melba Opera Trust?

Mary-Jane: We're not actually quite sure how we got to know about the Melba Trust, but we'd been giving modestly to the Victorian Opera and the Mietta Song Competition, and started to receive the Melba Trust's magazine in the mail. We found it very interesting, and it matched our own ideas about that crucial period of a career when people need support, both in science and in the arts. It's that pre-professional stage, where there's a gap following university study. So we got in touch with the Melba Trust, and at that point we were contemplating a bequest in our wills, but after discussions with Amy and Peter, we decided to give in our lifetimes so that we could enjoy seeing the progress of our scholars, and follow their development. It's really a lovely way to do it, and we're very glad we changed our minds. We know how our support is working, and we're really enjoying being part of it—it's just wonderful.

I gather that the inaugural recipient of your scholarship, Jeremy Kleeman, was already known to you?

Joe: Jeremy came to our notice when he was part of the new Victorian Opera/Melbourne Conservatorium of Music Master's program. The students were all terrific but Jeremy particularly catches your eye when he's onstage.

Mary-Jane: He's very natural—'in the moment' and in the story. He was fabulous in *The Magic Pudding*. He's a charming young man, and interestingly, he has a science background as well! So when we found out that he was one of the successful Melba scholars, we said, "If he's not already claimed, we would love to support him". It's a great pleasure for us that he is our first Scholar.

You obviously go to the opera often. How was it that opera came into your lives in such a significant way?

Mary-Jane: It was really Joe. He was a Liverpool plumber's son, and it was a music teacher who noticed he had a lovely boy soprano voice when he sang in his grammar school choir. Benjamin Britten was to conduct a performance of his *Spring Symphony*, and they needed some extra boys for the boys' choir in the piece, and Joe's teacher put him forward!

Joe: It's a choral symphony about the progress of winter to spring. Britten set poems by Edmund Spenser, John Clare, George Peel and W. H. Auden. It's a hopeful piece of music—not at all melancholic or introspective, like much of Britten's music. I was only about 11, so it was quite an experience!

So when did you start going to the opera after that?

Joe: Actually, I resisted going to the opera for years, because I thought I wasn't mature enough to take it—I somehow knew it was going to be an overwhelming experience. The only encounter I had with opera when I was younger was Gilbert and Sullivan's *Yeoman of the Guard*. The D'Oyly Carte came to Liverpool for a summer season, and the girl I was going out with at the time had access to free tickets. The *Yeoman of the Guard* is as close as G&S ever got to Grand Opera—enough to give me a glimpse of the concentrated emotional power that opera can deliver. But science at high level is addictive and 20 or so years were to pass before I saw my next opera which was I think, *Billy Budd*. And from then on, I was hooked!

And when did your interest develop, Mary-Jane?

Mary-Jane: It was after I got to know Joe. I was living in London and he in New York. The first time I went to New York to visit Joe, we were at The Met seeing Mozart's *Così fan tutte* the night I flew in. I almost needed matchsticks to keep my eyes open, but I loved it! Funnily enough, years before, I'd seen the movie *Sunday Bloody Sunday* with Glenda Jackson, and the trio 'Soave sia il vento' was on the soundtrack. It really caught my attention, so it was rather serendipitous that the first opera I went to with Joe was *Così fan tutte*! After that, we went to the opera often in New York and also in Dallas, Houston and Santa Fe.

Joe: We had a subscription to The Met for years and years. In fact after we moved away from New York, we used fly back there six or seven times a year to sit in the same seats - our seats we called them - for the Saturday evening performances. This year, we are going to London for the English summer and have managed to get tickets to hear Joyce di Donato in *Maria Stuarda* at Covent Garden. It was pretty much sold out when we went on-line to book, which is always good sign!

You'll be aware that three of our alumni were accepted into this year's intake of the Jette Parker Young Artists Program at Covent Garden. And they took only five out of about 400 applicants.

Mary-Jane: Yes—it’s amazing! Last year we saw Verdi’s *Don Carlos* on the main stage, but we noticed that there’s another theatre downstairs called the Linbury Studio Theatre. We saw an operatic version of *The Importance of Being Earnest* with music composed by Gerald Barry. The cast was made up of young people and I believe there were singers from the Young Artists Program in it. It was absolutely wonderful, so I’m hoping those three Melba alumni get to do some performances like that.

Yes they will. The Young Artists are doing Rossini’s La scala de seta this year in the Linbury Theatre, and they’ll also get the opportunity to perform and cover some roles on the main stage.

Mary-Jane: It’s really exciting to watch the progress of these young singers, and it’s obvious to us how successful the Melba Trust’s Program has been. But it’s not surprising, because the model of professional practice and support is fantastic. It must give the singers a real boost in confidence knowing how well they’ve been prepared to live the life of an opera singer—that they understand the ‘nuts and bolts’ of the business, and have already got the contacts and the tools to compete overseas.

Joe: It’s giving them every advantage, and coming from Australia, you need a bit of a leg up!

Mary-Jane: I can remember finishing a PhD here and feeling that the rest of the world was so far away, and you didn’t really know how things worked overseas. And they used to bring two or three eminent scientists from overseas each year to the big biochemistry conference, and the students got a chance to meet and talk with these people, which was really useful. The Melba Trust scholars get that in spades through the Mentor Program.

Joe, I’ve watched a clip on the internet of James Watson speaking about you. (Watson was co-discoverer of the structure of DNA in 1953 and co-winner of the 1962 Nobel Prize in Physiology/ Medicine.) I gather he was the one who hired you at the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory. He said you were logical, bright, had drive, worked hard, had high objectives and that you were tough on yourself and other people! I wonder how these qualities inform what you might expect of a young singer?

Joe: I think that by the time these singers get to where they are when we first see them, those same qualities that Jim lists are already there, but need burnishing. We went to the master class with Merlyn Quaife in February, and it was fantastic. I mean Jeremy Kleeman got up and sang a Schubert song, and it was very good. Then Merlyn worked

with Jeremy on it, and he sang it again. It was like night and day—it was magic! But as Jim Watson points out, you have to be tough as well as talented to stand up to that kind of analysis in public.

Mary-Jane: Even though it might seem that scientific research and opera are worlds apart, you can see the same underlying requirements of people if they’re going to succeed. They need that inner strength and drive. Nobody’s going to give that to you if you haven’t got it. And I mean talent is a requirement, but it’s not enough.

Joe: There were plenty of young scientists working with me who were more talented than I ever was, but hopeless in other ways. There are millions of reasons for people to fail, and you have to work on them so that each reason for failing is taken away and their talents are burnished

Mary-Jane: I think Joe’s right. The people that the Melba Trust is selecting wouldn’t be candidates if they hadn’t worked hard already.

Joe: They’re already toughened up a bit.

Just to finish off, I wanted to ask how you feel opera balances or contributes to your enjoyment of life?

Joe: I couldn’t imagine life without it. I can’t imagine life without opera. Can you, Mary-Jane?

Mary-Jane: No, not now, but until I met you, I didn’t know what it could mean. We go to the Metropolitan Opera productions on at the cinema here too, and although it isn’t always shown, I love it when all the house lights go up just before the curtain—that’s the moment the magic begins. We wondered if being able to see opera in the cinema would stop us going to live opera, but it hasn’t at all.

Joe: I still get excited just watching the people beforehand, and then walking into the theatre and sitting down. And when all the chatting in the audience slowly fades, and there’s perfect silence and the curtain is drawn up. It’s fantastic! Even when you hear something you’ve heard 50 times before, such as *La traviata*, it’s still got the power to move you. It just seems to me that opera is right on the edge of what humans can actually do.

Mary-Jane: So you can understand why we so much value the opportunity to watch our Melba scholars’ singing careers develop and flourish. We’re thrilled to be involved in this way, and we highly recommend it to others!



BRENTON SPITERI (TENOR)

John and Elizabeth Wright-Smith Scholarship

A Melba Trust Scholar for the third year in a row, Brenton Spiteri will be no stranger to readers. With an impressive list of performances to his name, and having won the 88th Herald Sun Aria in 2012, Brenton’s career is flourishing. In 2014, he hopes to “continue developing technically and artistically”. He has already performed in a number of concerts and recitals, and has “several performances on the horizon” to assist him in these goals:

“I started off the year with a part in the rarely-performed *Petite Messe Solennelle* by Rossini. This is a very challenging piece of music, but I was part of a fantastic line-up of singers and friends, which made the experience very pleasurable. I then gave a solo recital with the Continuo Collective at the Melbourne Recital Centre Salon at the beginning of March, performing works for voice and guitars in various combinations by Britten and Dowland, as well as some new songs by my wonderful singing teacher Dermot Tutty. I was a little nervous at the prospect of doing an entire recital without piano accompaniment, as the guitar makes a much more delicate sound, which can’t be sustained through the use of pedals as a piano can. However, the recital went very well and the group received some very positive reviews.”

One such review was that written for Classic Melbourne by Heather Leviston (www.classicmelbourne.com.au/reviews/english-songbook/). She remarked on Brenton’s “clear, firm voice” which has “considerable

beauty” and on his superb breath control, musical intelligence, thorough preparation and professionalism. But what “sets him apart from many other young singers”, she added, “is his ability to communicate with his audience”.

At the moment Brenton is very busy working in the chorus for three Opera Australia productions at once: Verdi’s *Rigoletto*, Bizet’s *Carmen* and Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin*. He is enjoying the challenge of “rehearsing one opera by day and performing another at night”, singing in three different languages and following a huge variety of stage directions.

One of the highlights of the Melba Opera Trust program for Brenton is the relationships scholars establish with supporters of the Trust:

“I feel very privileged to have been the recipient of the John and Elizabeth Wright Smith scholarship for the past three years. Two more generous and enthusiastic supporters would be difficult to find, and they have become great friends. When I won the Herald Sun Aria two years ago, John was one of the first people on the phone to me the next day with enthusiastic congratulations. Both John and Liz have been consistently supportive of me, having me perform at their annual birthday bash and copying a huge amount of CDs of John’s favourite tenors for me to listen to. I’m still making my way through most of them, but relieved that John and I share similar tastes in favourite singers!”

Brenton holds a Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Music (Hons) degree from the University of Melbourne.



MATTHEW REARDON (TENOR)

**Margaret Schofield Opera Scholarship
Beleura-Tallis Opera Scholarship**

In his second year with the Melba Trust, Matthew Reardon is “thrilled about being a repeat scholar”:

My first year was fantastic, and allowed me to explore and solidify things. This year, I hope to develop those further. Last year’s Mentor Program was terrific, and we worked with many wonderful mentors. The same can be said for this year. We’ve already had some new and different mentors with many more to come. I’m really looking forward to working with them.

Matthew is honoured to be the holder of the Margaret Schofield Opera Scholarship this year. This Scholarship was established by Schofield’s family in recognition of distinguished career as a piano soloist, accompanist and teacher. It acknowledges a life devoted to music, as well as her affection for the Melba Conservatorium, and her support of singers and opera in Melbourne. “Our mother’s life was devoted to music. She had a great affection for the Melba Conservatorium, as it existed during her life, and was a great supporter of singers and opera in Melbourne,” says Dr Andrew Cochrane. “We learned from our mother that music is a hard road for young people. We hope to make that journey a little easier through the Margaret Schofield Opera Scholarship, by allowing a cohort of young singers to establish a career.”

The Scholarship is being put to good use by Matthew, who is enjoying the opportunity to narrow his focus this year. In particular, he is already working hard on his language skills, and will continue to do so. He had the chance to put this into practice recently, as he was part of the chorus in Handa Opera on the Harbour’s production of Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*:

This was my second year in Opera on the Harbour, and it was again a wonderful experience and privilege to be a part of. I worked with great singers from whom I could learn. I also enjoyed the fact that many of my friends and family were able to attend, some of whom had never been to the opera before, and were blown away by the experience. They said it was unforgettable!

Margaret Schofield provided more tangible support for Matthew and the other 2014 Melba Scholars at the year’s inaugural master class with Merlyn Quaife. The class was hosted at Richmond Uniting Church and the piano that accompanied the class was none other than Margaret Schofield’s own, donated to the Victorian Music Teachers Association by the Cochrane Schofield Trust.

Matthew holds a Bachelor of Music from the Western Australia Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA).



JEREMY KLEEMAN (BASS BARITONE)

Joseph Sambrook Opera Scholarship

Having just completed the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music’s collaborative Master’s degree with the Victorian Opera, Jeremy Kleeman is well poised to take the next step in his opera-singing career with his Melba Opera Trust scholarship. He has gained excellent practical experience during the past two years of being immersed in the world of professional opera early in his development, and feels he now has a “much better understanding of what it takes to be a professional opera singer and of the ‘ins and outs’ of the functioning of an opera company”:

“In the first year I only covered roles, but last year I was given lots of time on stage and had an absolute ball. I was a communist photographer in John Adams’ *Nixon in China*, a scary masked Ogre in Xavier Montsalvalge’s *Puss in Boots*, the Horn Player and Soldier’s Shadow in *Sunday in the Park with George* (Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine), and a tango dancer in *Maria de Buenos Aires* by Astor Piazzolla. But the greatest opportunity I had was the role of ‘Albert the Pudding’ in the world premiere of *The Magic Pudding*, an opera with music by Calvin Bowman and libretto by Anna Goldsworthy. I also had to operate the pudding puppet, which was an interesting challenge, and spotlighted my physical comedy—something I’ve always loved doing! We toured this production around regional Victoria, and it was a fantastic success.”

This year, Jeremy has been given a couple of small roles in Victorian Opera’s season. He is currently rehearsing Verdi’s *La traviata*, which is proving to be an interesting experience:

“Violetta is being sung by Australian soprano Jessica Pratt, who has built an incredibly impressive reputation in Italy’s major opera houses, but she remains down-to-earth, and has been very willing to share her career adventures with less-experienced members of the cast. The director, Henning Brockhaus, is also well known internationally, and is conducting rehearsals in a mixture of Italian, German, and English. This has been extremely useful for my own language development! The other principals, José Carbó and Alessandro Scotto di Luzio, are world class as well, and I’m really looking forward to performing alongside them.”

The Melba Opera Trust’s Mentor Program is building upon the extremely useful experience Jeremy has had over the past two years, and continues to have:

“The mentor blocks have given me a framework upon which to base this year. Reflecting on the most recent block, the highlights for me were the sessions with soprano Daria Masiero and Alexander technique expert Greg Holdaway, who both completely changed how I think about my singing, so that was invaluable.”

In his busy schedule, including rehearsals for *La traviata*, Mentor Program blocks and Melba Artists performances, Jeremy has also found time to put his Melba scholarship to good use in funding his singing lessons and language development.

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

LETTERS FROM ABROAD

THIS IS THE FIRST IN WHAT WE HOPE WILL BE A SERIES OF ‘LETTERS FROM ABROAD’ SENT BY MELBA OPERA TRUST ALUMNI WHO HAVE MOVED ON TO FURTHER STUDY OVERSEAS. LAUREN FAGAN WAS THE RECIPIENT OF THE DAME NELLIE MELBA SCHOLARSHIP AND THE PATRICK AND VIVIAN GORDON AWARD IN BOTH 2011 AND 2012. IN LATE 2012, LAUREN RELOCATED TO LONDON TO TAKE UP A SCHOLARSHIP IN OPERA STUDIES AT THE GUILDHALL SCHOOL OF MUSIC AND DRAMA. RECENTLY, LAUREN WAS ONE OF THREE MELBA OPERA TRUST ALUMNI TO BE ACCEPTED INTO THE PRESTIGIOUS JETTE PARKE YOUNG ARTISTS PROGRAM AT THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, COVENT GARDEN. HERE SHE SHARES HER NEWS:

Thursday 3 April 2014

Dear Friends and Family,

It has been a while since I last wrote with an update on things happening in London, so I hope you enjoy some of my news and developments.

It seems like a long time ago now, but less than a month ago we had the performances of my final opera at Guildhall, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, composed by Jonathan Dove with a libretto by Alasdair Middleton. We were lucky enough to have the composer come to many of the rehearsals, and also to work with Eilene Hannan on the English, as they riskily decided to have no surtitles for the performances. It was the first time a conservatoire had

performed this opera, and overall it was very well received. Glyndebourne chorus rehearsals started two weeks ago, and I have moved from London to the beautiful town of Lewes (the main town closest to Glyndebourne).

I am living in a big house with my friend Josh, another singer from Guildhall, but there are lots of singers scattered all around the town. We each have our own room and a big living space, but we share the house with an older couple. I’m very glad I chose to live in Lewes, as it makes it possible to go in early to practise, and also to spend time with the other singers. (However in saying that, it is just over an hour to get back into London by train, so I’m going back

most weekends to keep my singing lessons up).

The first opera I am a part of is Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin*. Last week the main challenge was working on the Russian language, but it has all come together very quickly and the sound is quite impressive already. Shortly we will begin work on Verdi’s *La traviata* (where I will be covering one of the small roles, Annina), and then later on Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*.

A few days ago The Royal Opera House announced the coming season for next year. I have been given some nice little roles that will allow me to ease into the intense year coming up. My biggest role will be singing Giulia in



Rossini’s *La scala di seta*. This opera won’t be on the main house stage, but is a chance to perform with the other new Young Artists and with orchestra. I have already started working hard on this role, as Giulia rarely leaves the stage and the role involves a fair amount of coloratura (fast passages of notes), which my voice is currently not particularly attuned to doing!! I’m feeling very motivated to develop this technique, as I think if I can master this role, a whole new area of repertoire will be opened up to me, and I also want to make a good first impression.

On the Opera House main stage, I’m very excited to be singing Papagena in Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*, and will also be one of the Girls in Kurt Weill’s *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (with a libretto by Bertolt Brecht). The roles that I will be covering include Gianetta in Donizetti’s *L’elisir d’amore*, Oskar in Verdi’s *Un ballo in maschera* and Jemmy in Rossini’s *Guillaume Tell*. There are a lot of big names singing the lead roles in these operas so will be great to see them at work. Here is more information about the season if of interest: www.roh.org.uk/news/opera-and-music-201415

Just before heading to Glyndebourne I attended the Jette Parker Young Artists Program Induction week. The other four young artists selected had come from all over to be there; it was

a funny experience to be the only girl with four extremely tall boys but I’m sure I will get used to it! :) It was also nice to see the two other Australians Sam and Samuel, who I know well from my time with the Dame Nellie Melba Opera Trust.

We launched straight into a week of sessions to give us a taste of the various coaches and services we have access to—now and for the rest of our lives! Over the week we were involved in sessions including Stage Fighting, Media and Interviews, Stagecraft, Movement, Alexander technique, Vocal Coaching with a number of highly-regarded teachers (including Yvonne Kenny), and Mind Skills, which I found particularly interesting, as the woman taking the session is able to help with things from organisation, to calming nerves, building adrenalin and switching off after performances in order to fall asleep.

So far I am loving my first real taste of working as a singer, although sometimes it’s hard to think of Glyndebourne as work when you are singing in such a beautiful environment!

Hope all of you are well, and would love to hear any news from back home.

Love Lauren



STEFAN CASSOMENOS (ASSOCIATE REPETITEUR)



AN EXPERT REPETITEUR POSSESSES A UNIQUE SET OF SKILLS AND WORKING WITH SUCH A SPECIALIST IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF OPERATIC TRAINING. IN THE SECOND YEAR THAT THE MELBA TRUST HAS OFFERED THIS SCHOLARSHIP, MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE GENEROSITY OF THE HELEN MACPHERSON SMITH TRUST, STEFAN CASSOMENOS WAS SUCCESSFULLY APPOINTED AS THE 2014 ASSOCIATE REPETITEUR WITH THE MELBA OPERA TRUST. HE HAS A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF HIS GOALS FOR THE YEAR AHEAD:

There are two main focuses for me this year. Firstly, I am honing my skills in helping singers to prepare for upcoming engagements. A repetiteur should be able to provide the musical expertise, experience and understanding of stylistic differences, and importantly an objective second set of ears, to help the singers with all of these aspects of their preparation. Secondly, the scholarship funding is providing me with an opportunity to work on languages, in particular Italian, which is naturally crucial due to the vast body of Italian operatic repertoire, but is also important from the perspective of vocal technique.

Stefan works closely with the Melba Artists team and with the singers in their preparations for Melba Artists recitals, which he accompanies when possible. He also accompanies them in master classes, providing him with several benefits, including gaining more exposure to the operatic repertoire, learning from the masters’ feedback and developing essential musical rapport with the singers.

Individually mentored by Sharolyn Kimmorley, Stefan will also work intensively with visiting mentor repetiteurs David Aronson and Semyon Rozin. In addition, he will benefit from the conductors involved in the Mentor Program, Marko Letonja and Johannes Fritsch.

It goes without saying that a repetiteur needs to be a fine musician and pianist, and Stefan has certainly proven himself in both regards. He has made his mark as an exceptional soloist, having been successful in piano competitions and being in demand as a recitalist and soloist both in Australia and overseas. But this does not preclude a desire to be an equally accomplished repetiteur:

My interest in pursuing a career as a repetiteur and vocal coach stems from over ten years of very musically-satisfying work with singers. This work includes some of my most valued musical experiences. I feel that all music has a basis either in dance or song, and understanding the human voice is critical to achieving the

correct nuances and gestures when performing all music. I believe that my exposure to singing has given me an advantageous insight into music, and I have felt the benefits in all areas of my work, whether as a concert pianist, chamber musician, associate artist, composer or conductor.

As an example of these benefits, Stefan cites his work as a founding member of contemporary chamber music ensemble PLEXUS (with violinist Monica Curro and clarinettist Philip Arkinstall). The group has commissioned over 50 composers since launching in early 2014 and is giving the world premières of 21 new works this year. “We are doing a great deal of work with vocalists” Stefan says, “and so again, working with singers has proven to be a really important part of my life as a musician”.

General Manager Amy Black expresses the Trust’s appreciation for what Stefan is bringing to his role:

“We are delighted with the way in which Stefan has embraced this

leadership role with the Melba Opera Trust. He brings artistic integrity to the performances of our scholars. And it’s really encouraging to see his enthusiasm and to witness his eagerness to learn from our Mentors.”

“It appears that the feeling is mutual. Stefan very much appreciates having been “invited to be a part of this magnificent program”, adding that he is “grateful for the rare opportunity to work with the most experienced and insightful mentors, and also with such wonderful up-and-coming young opera stars”.

One such aspiring opera singer, Melba Trust scholar Rebecca Gulinello, has worked with Stefan on a number of occasions. “He’s a wonderful musician who is great to work with”, she says. “He understands how to collaborate, is constructive with his comments and really helps bring poise and polish to a piece.”

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.

The Associate Repetiteur scholarship is supported by the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust.



Lauren Fagan



Samuel Johnson



Samuel Sakker

AUDITIONING FOR YOUNG ARTISTS PROGRAMS OVERSEAS IS OFTEN THE NEXT STEP FOR MELBA SCHOLARS. AND WHILE MELBA OPERA TRUST PROGRAMS AIM TO ARM THESE YOUNG SINGERS WITH THE BROAD SUITE OF SKILLS REQUIRED TO BE WELL PREPARED, THE AUDITION PROCESS CAN BE ARDUOUS AND STRESSFUL.

MELBA

TAKES CENTRE STAGE AT COVENT GARDEN

We were delighted with the recent news that three former Melba scholars were among only five who won places in this year's prestigious Jette Parker Young Artists Program at The Royal Opera. With many of our scholars and alumni winning competitions and awards, this news represents just one of many outstanding results from a company as young as Melba Opera Trust. Trust Alumni Lauren Fagan, Samuel Johnson and Samuel Sakker were selected from nearly 400 applicants worldwide for this coveted program, widely considered one of the world's best for young opera artists.

It is highly pertinent that 87 years after Dame Nellie Melba's final farewell to her beloved Covent Garden, she will again grace the stage through her legacy to our superb alumni. Her wish that her bequest should establish a scholarship "... in the hope that another Melba may arise" is being realised. Through the Melba Opera Trust scholarship, mentor and performance programs, Dame Nellie has supported the development of these three young artists and their entry into the world famous opera house that she herself once considered her "operatic home" and which indeed made hers a household name.

The Jette Parker Young Artists work as salaried members of The Royal Opera for a two-year period, during which time they perform in a variety of main-stage productions, concerts and recitals, as well as covering lead

roles. They also receive coaching in all opera disciplines, including role interpretation, language and stagecraft.

Preparing for induction into the Jette Parker Young Artists Program earlier this year, Lauren was feeling "excited, privileged and driven to work harder than ever before". She recalled the Melba message that "...if we utilise the amazing resources and support we were given by Melba Opera Trust, combined with our own hard work, there is a huge possibility of success at the highest level." Lauren said the Melba Opera Trust and its programs gave impetus to her drive to succeed.

Sam Johnson sees the Jette Parker Young Artist Program opportunity as an entrée to achieving his dream of performing on The Royal Opera main stage in a lead role. "That's what I wake up every morning thinking about—the possibility of that", he said.

Samuel Sakker strongly believes "talent can be discovered but great artists are developed". He is grateful to the Melba Opera Trust for providing tailored opportunities for development and enriching his professional knowledge. "The Trust helped me to develop into the artist that I am today" he added.

With the Jette Parker Young Artists Program induction week now behind him, we caught up with Samuel Sakker again to hear about his experience. It seems he now has a good sense of

what to expect when he takes up his place in September this year:

"The induction week was about getting an idea of how the program functions, and 'whetting our whistles'. It's not a structured program, so it was great to have the opportunity to see the huge array of people we could work with and things we could choose to do. We worked with different singers, with some conductors and with language specialists; we worked with acting specialists and directors, and we even had a stage fighting class which was great fun!"

As is the Melba Trust's, the Jette Parker Program is very self-driven, with each young artist designing their own activities for each week. For example, they might choose to have three singing coaching sessions, some Italian coaching, a session with a psychotherapist, and so on. And according to Samuel Sakker, this certainly came across during the induction week:

"It's very different from, say, a university degree, where people are channelled towards certain targets. It was clear that it's more about catering to each individual's journey towards attaining the highest-possible standard by working with international artists of the highest-possible standard."

The week also offered the opportunity for the five singers to get to know one another. Naturally our three former Melba Scholars had a head start,

though they had not heard each other sing for some time, so noticed their respective developments:

"There were huge changes. It was really great to hear Lauren and Sam again, because I knew their journeys. But the group as a whole got on really well—we just knew not to mention the Ashes!"

Samuel was pleasantly surprised by the friendly, accepting and understanding environment at The Royal Opera:

"I walked into my first singing coaching after being in London for three days, and I was told straight away by the head of the program, 'We understand that people have good days and bad days and they get sick and jetlagged, and that anything can happen. So you don't need to put pressure on yourself every time you walk into a coaching room.'"

On 13 April this year, Samuel performed in a concert, 'Operation Covent Garden' at Iwaki Auditorium in Melbourne to raise funds for his forthcoming re-location to London. Singing alongside him were friends and mentors Emma Matthews, José Carbó and Deborah Humble, who gave their time and talent to help Samuel in his cause. Samuel's vocal coach répétiteur Raymond Lawrence was at the piano. The recital was an enormous success, and Samuel is appreciative of the assistance he received from the Melba Trust:

"The Melba has been very supportive of me, not just musically and financially, but also if I just needed to have a chat with someone. That can be just as helpful as everything else sometimes! They were terrific in helping me market the concert, giving me advice as to how to go about things and whom to approach and how to approach them. And they came along, as did many of the Melba supporters. It was really lovely."

Melba Trust General Manager Amy Black sums up the success as follows:

"We are so proud of Lauren, Sam and Samuel, and thrilled for them! It is brilliant to see their commitment to the operatic vocation realised in such an exceptional opportunity. If we are selecting the best young opera singers in Australia you expect them to be winning the major competitions, but to have achieved so much success in an international program pitted against some of the world's brightest and best—that IS really an achievement."

We wish our alumni all the best on this exciting step in their careers and look forward to hearing more from Lauren, Sam and Samuel once the program commences in September.

DAME HEATHER B



Photo courtesy of Opera Australia

A GREAT LEGACY AT WORK

“IN SETTING UP THIS AWARD, THE THREE OF US TO WHOM DAME HEATHER BEGG ENTRUSTED HER ESTATE HAVE SOUGHT TO ENSURE THAT IT HAS A SIMPLICITY AND UNIQUENESS THAT REFLECTS HER OWN DISTINCTIVE ARTISTIC CHARACTER.”

MOFFATT OXENBOULD AM

Speaking on behalf of the Trustees of Dame Heather Begg’s estate, Executor Moffatt Oxenbould said they were “thrilled to be associated with the Melba Opera Trust in launching the Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award at an elegant and gracious function at ‘Elaine’ in Sydney in December 2013”.

Moffatt provides a clear picture of nature of Dame Heather’s career:

“Dame Heather Begg was a unique artist blessed with a beautiful voice and a natural instinct and ability to perform. During her long operatic career, she was associated with many of the world’s finest conductors,

reflected Dame Heather’s express wishes and her own career as authentically and directly as possible. “We wanted the funds available each year to be devoted to the artistic development of the recipient and not side-tracked into setting up a competition structure with all its associated costs”, said Moffatt. In the knowledge that they had access to informed advice from experienced operatic professionals, including Melba Opera Trust Artistic Advisor Sharolyn Kimmorley AM, they decided to present the award to “a suitable young singer from Australia or New Zealand who had already taken successful first steps in a professional principal career, and who would benefit artistically from having access to funds for travel and tuition to refine and mature an already-evident operatic talent” Moffatt added.

Melba Conservatorium graduate baritone Samuel Dundas was duly selected and contacted to ask if he would accept the inaugural Award. “We like to think that Dame Heather would have smiled and appreciated the clarity of this somewhat unorthodox approach”, said Moffatt. For Samuel, it was a phone call that promised an enormous impact on his future career:

“To receive the Award was not only a wonderful commendation from people I respect greatly, but it was a poignant reminder that working hard is the key to success. This Award has had a definitive effect on my development so far. Opportunity is the key platform for any artist wishing to advance in their chosen craft! The opportunities created for me through this fantastic Award have not only been great experiences, but will prove invaluable in creating future opportunities both in Australia and abroad.”

To date the Award has enabled Samuel to travel to Sicily and London to further his studies:

“Having spent time in mainland Italy,

I chose Sicily to continue my language studies as a way of challenging myself in an unfamiliar environment. I had private tuition at the Italian Language School in Palermo for two weeks, which greatly improved my Italian. I then spent a month in London, working with coaches from the Royal Opera, and had some lessons with Yvonne Kenny AM. I also sang for various agencies, one of which will be very helpful during future European visits. I am indebted to Dame Heather’s estate and to the Melba Opera Trust for their generosity and support of young performers.”

Melba Opera Trust Managing Director Peter Garnick says that the Trust is “absolutely delighted to be associated with the Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award”:

“Dames Nellie and Heather each enjoyed uniquely distinguished careers and left such rich legacies for young singers of today. This exciting new Award offers the possibility of a ‘next step’ following on naturally from our own, post-tertiary Program. The Melba Opera Trust considers it an honour to be in partnership with the stewards of Dame Heather’s legacy via this Award that represents such a distinctive vision.”

According to Moffat, in approaching the Melba Opera Trust to administer the Award, the Trustees realised that their own aims and obligations could “benefit significantly from an on-going association with an organisation with similar ideas and aspirations”:

“We have been extremely fortunate to have begun an evolving relationship with the Melba Opera Trust that is already proving to be both stimulating and mutually beneficial. Together we are confident that we can honour the memories of two much-loved, notable but absolutely unique artists while giving meaningful assistance and support to artists of today with similar dreams and aspirations to their own.”

THE LEGACY BEHIND THE AWARD

FORMER OPERA AUSTRALIA ARTISTIC DIRECTOR AND DAME HEATHER BEGG ESTATE EXECUTOR, MOFFATT OXENBOULD AM, FILLS US IN ON THE LIFE, CAREER AND LEGACY OF THIS WONDERFUL MEZZO SOPRANO:

Dame Heather Begg was born into a Scottish family in New Zealand in December 1932 and died in Sydney in May 2009. Music became an important part of her life in childhood and she studied both violin and double bass. Her vocal potential was also obvious—and encouraged by important teachers.

In 1954 the National Opera of Australia toured New Zealand and Heather Begg was invited to make her professional debut as a guest artist, singing Azucena in *Il trovatore*. Her success

House Covent Garden took place in 1959 in Wagner’s *Die Walküre*. Other operatic engagements followed with the Carl Rosa Opera and the New Opera Company. From 1961 until 1964 she was a principal mezzo-soprano with Sadler’s Wells Opera, appearing throughout the United Kingdom.

In 1964 she sang the title role in Rossini’s *La Cenerentola* with the New Zealand Opera Company and in 1967 returned to the United Kingdom for guest engagements with the Royal



Dame Heather Begg – Photo courtesy of Opera Australia

was immediate and led to an invitation to come to Australia, where, in 1955, she toured the country as a member of J.C. Williamson’s Italian Opera Company and was placed in the top three of the Mobil Quest in both 1955 and 1956. Her greatest competition success was to win the prestigious Sydney Sun Aria in 1955.

In those days, a satisfying full-time operatic career in Australia or New Zealand seemed an unlikely aspiration, so she set her sights on the United Kingdom, and left for London in 1957 to undertake an intensive three years of study at the National School of Opera. Her debut at the Royal Opera

Opera, Sadler’s Wells Opera and Scottish Opera, eventually joining the Royal Opera Covent Garden in 1972 as a resident artist. It was with The Royal Opera, in Elijah Moshinsky’s production of *Peter Grimes*, that she appeared at La Scala in Milan. Throughout this period she continued to work technically with voice teacher, Florence Wiese-Norberg, whom she credited as being the most influential and beneficial of her teachers.

At the beginning of the 1975/76 Season, Dame Heather made her American debut with the Lyric Opera of Chicago as Marcellina in *Le nozze di Figaro*—a role she subsequently filmed

EGG 1932 - 2009

in Jean-Pierre Ponnelle’s production—conducted by Karl Böhm.

In 1976 she accepted Richard Bonyngé’s invitation to appear with The Australian Opera as Amneris in *Aida* in the Concert Hall of the Sydney Opera House. Her decision to join the ensemble of The Australian Opera brought joy to her colleagues and the Australian public. She sang with the Company—and occasionally with the state opera companies—for the next 30 years, in repertoire from Monteverdi to Meale, and almost everything in between.

But returning to Australia didn’t bring an end to her international career; she appeared at Festivals in Orange, Salzburg and Edinburgh, and accepted invitations to perform with the San Francisco Opera, San Diego Opera,

performer, as indeed she was. But Dame Heather’s artistic personality was firmly centred on music—on her sound—and her obligation to be a faithful interpreter of the music of the master composers she served. On the operatic stage she discovered an unquenchable passion for performance. Working with notable conductors and directors, uniting the mighty forces of music and drama, she found her true calling. Her discipline was exemplary and the demands she put on herself extraordinary. She dedicated herself to the pursuit of excellence and knew from observing others in her early stage adventures that excellence is only achieved by hard work. If the preparation is thorough, imagination and remarkable performance ‘instincts’ can flourish.

Dame Heather revelled in the ensemble nature of The Australian Opera—working with like-minded colleagues, with shared expectations in terms of aspiration, energy, discipline and good, old-fashioned professionalism.

Her repertoire was vast and varied. Naturally she loved singing the big roles but she also accepted the challenge of roles of secondary prominence within the drama. One can never forget her Flora in *La traviata*: capricious, frivolous, glamorous, tantalisingly sexy, finding all her own moments, but never diverting attention from the major principals, just making their performances ‘notch up’ a little bit because of her presence and her ability to listen and immerse herself so completely in musical storytelling.

Offstage she was gentle, reserved and unassuming. Onstage, playing characters like Carmen, Marina in *Boris Godunov* or the Principessa di Bouillon in *Adriana Lecouvreur*, she was a tigress—powerful, alluring, dangerous and wildly passionate.

She also excelled in the ‘battleaxe’ roles: Katisha, Florence Pike, Zita, La Zia Principessa, and many more: multi-faceted, intense and, where appropriate, funny and endearing. With some of these ladies, like Lady Jane in *Patience*, The Fairy Queen in *Iolanthe* and Lady Allcash in *Fra Diavolo*, she found, with an eccentric glamour, a fascinating mixture of the grotesque and the loveable.

Dame Heather Begg’s contribution to the development and setting of standards in opera in Australia is immense. Her generous legacy in setting up the Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award ensures that young singers of today, with dreams and aspirations similar to hers at the beginning of her own notable career, will have the opportunity to pursue the excellence that she so often achieved.”

Moffatt Oxenbould 2013

Vancouver, the Liceu in Barcelona and also returned to The Royal Opera in London.

Dame Heather was awarded the OBE, and in 2000 was made a Distinguished Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit, this honour having replaced Damehood in the New Zealand Honours. On 17th April 2009 the Governor General of New Zealand announced that the Queen had been pleased to approve the re-designation of Miss Heather Begg DNZM, OBE as Dame Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit.

She was frequently described as a great singing actress and a fabulous



Inaugural recipient Samuel Dundas and Sharolyn Kimmorley AM

IN HER HONOUR..

IN DECEMBER LAST YEAR, FRIENDS OF DAME HEATHER BEGG TOGETHER WITH SUPPORTERS OF THE MELBA OPERA TRUST GATHERED AT ‘ELAINE’, THE HISTORIC FAIRFAX ESTATE IN SYDNEY, TO LAUNCH OFFICIALLY THE DAME HEATHER BEGG MEMORIAL AWARD. GENEROUS HOSTS MARK AND LOUISE NELSON WELCOMED INVITED GUESTS INTO THEIR HOME ON THIS BRIGHT AND SUNNY DAY TO CELEBRATE THE AUSPICIOUS OCCASION AT WATER’S EDGE IN SYDNEY’S DOUBLE BAY.

Moffatt Oxenbould AM, an executor of Dame Heather Begg’s estate, launched the Award, presenting it to the inaugural recipient, baritone Samuel Dundas. A Melba Conservatorium graduate who is now working professionally with Opera Australia, Samuel is using the \$20,000 award for the purposes for which it was designed: to enable the ‘next step’ of international development for an established young professional. In his case, the award funding will provide singing and language coaching in Italy and the UK, and help him to establish those ever important contacts abroad.

SAMUEL ACKNOWLEDGED THE HONOUR, PERFORMING A MUSICAL PROGRAM FOR GUESTS ACCOMPANIED BY MELBA OPERA TRUST ARTISTIC ADVISOR AND LONG-TIME COLLEAGUE OF DAME HEATHER BEGG, SHAROLYN KIMMORLEY AM. FITTING FOR SUCH A SPECIAL TRIBUTE, SHAROLYN PLAYED ON A BEAUTIFUL STEINWAY B211 PIANO GENEROUSLY PROVIDED BY OUR FRIENDS AT THEME AND VARIATIONS.

With Melba Trust administering the Award, it was entirely appropriate that Samuel’s performance be complemented by current, third-time Melba scholar Brenton Spiteri (tenor) and Melba alumna Lauren Fagan (soprano). Serendipitous timing

meant that Lauren was on Christmas break from her studies at Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, and we were delighted that she was able to perform again for the Melba Opera Trust.

In conversations over food and wine provided by our event partners Katering and De Bortoli Wines, guests learned more about the activities of Melba Opera Trust and the Dame Heather Begg Award. The afternoon was enjoyed by all—an apt launch for a very special Award. It also marked a first for the Melba Opera Trust, offering the opportunity to ‘test the waters’ with a Sydney audience with the waters being found to be pleasantly warm!

MASTER CLASSES: A GLIMPSE BEHIND THE CURTAIN

STEPPING ONTO THE MAIN STAGE OF AN OPERA HOUSE REPRESENTS YEARS OF PAINSTAKING ATTENTION TO DETAIL; VOCALLY, MUSICALLY AND DRAMATICALLY, AND OF COURSE IT ALL NEEDS TO APPEAR EFFORTLESS!

As audiences we are the beneficiaries of the finished product, but an insight into what is required ‘behind the scenes’ provides a unique perspective into the preparation required. For that very reason, Melba Opera Trust enjoys inviting supporters to experience a rare glimpse into the process of refinement via the working master classes of our Mentor Program.

Recently a select group of supporters joined Melba scholars for two such master classes, both of which were accompanied on piano by Associate Repetiteur Stefan Cassomenos.

On 23 February, highly-regarded Australian soprano Merlyn Quaife was master for the afternoon at the Richmond Uniting Church. Singers Nikki Hill, Jade Moffatt, Matthew Reardon, Shauntai Batzke and Jeremy Kleeman each presented an aria and an art song for Merlyn to workshop.

Attendee Melba Opera Trust Founding Patron Mary-Jane Joscelyne truly loves being part of such occasions:

“I’ve watched the singers grow and learn from these master classes, and I learn too! Merlyn engaged with the singers with charm and warmth, but with an underlying strength. She’d suggest—gently but firmly—that a

singer change a little something, and it felt as if they couldn’t wait to try it. And even to a novice like me, the improvement was immediately evident. The sound in the church was lovely, so all in all it was a wonderful afternoon.”

In the very different setting of the beautiful private home ‘Astolat’ in Camberwell on 7 March, admired and respected Australian soprano Cheryl Barker worked her magic on Jade Moffat, Jeremy Kleeman and Rebecca Gulinello. Patron John Wright-Smith felt that it was “a great privilege” to be present:

“Cheryl Barker is extremely knowledgeable, warm and gracious. She generously shared her expertise and learning with the students, affirming them when appropriate. The process was fascinating. The three scholars, all in excellent voice, were each treated very differently. Within 30-40 seconds, Cheryl would find a problem, and with simple instructions and repetition, the problem was corrected. Everyone seemed enthralled with the session, and we really enjoyed the chance to talk with Cheryl and the scholars at a reception afterwards.”

For singers, having their performances appraised before an audience can be a confronting exercise, but for our scholars who are aspiring towards successful professional careers, it is an exercise with which experience brings comfort—all part of walking on stage to present an ‘effortless’ performance.



Merlyn Quaife AM working with Melba scholars

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