

# THE MELBA

MAGAZINE OF MELBA OPERA TRUST

Edition 14 Winter 2016

FIONA JOPSON WINS HERALD SUN ARIA

ANNOUNCING THE PAULETTE BISLEY  
OPERA SCHOLARSHIP

A MELBA PILGRIMAGE

MEET THE 2016 DAME HEATHER BEGG  
MEMORIAL AWARD RECIPIENTS



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# A NOTE FROM THE ACTING GENERAL MANAGER



**What a dynamic 12 months it has been since stepping into the General Manager role that Amy Black has so distinctively performed over the last ten years. Support from within the Melba community during this time has certainly made filling her impressive shoes much easier and it has been a delight to connect with you.**

Together with your support, Dame Nellie Melba's conviction that 'a beautiful voice is not enough' continues to drive all Melba Opera Trust activity and especially during the last 12 months of change and achievement.

- A fifth scholarship has been endowed by Warwick and Paulette Bisley.

- Endowment of the Mentor Program is underway with thanks to a leadership gift from John and Elizabeth Wright-Smith.
- A new fund manager JBWere, astutely helping on our journey towards full endowment.
- A significant celebration, for the Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship, being the 50th anniversary of Amelia's birth.
- Further growth in our supporter network with four events in Sydney featuring Melba scholars and alumni since last June.
- New staff to the Melba team – Carolyn Archibald, Tim Hannah and me.
- New baby! (Welcome, Charlotte Black.)

- An office relocation and IT upgrade for operational efficiencies.
- Adding two repetiteur scholars to the annual program.
- A Melba pilgrimage for the 2016 scholars.

The Melba journey continues this year with opportunities for you to hear Melba scholars in concert at Melbourne Recital Centre in July and September. As a premier training organisation, Melba Artists performances are usually for private, third-party clients, and so I encourage you take advantage of our Melbourne Recital Centre partnership for these special public concerts.

Thanks to the Melba family, our endowment continues to grow. A revised endowment goal of \$16 million will provide financial sustainability and the means to provide all scholarships and programs in perpetuity, for future generations of aspiring opera talent, just as Dame Nellie had intended with her initial bequest in 1931. To this end, we're working towards one of the remaining scholarships available for endowment to be supported by a syndicate of benefactors in Sydney as a part of this journey.

As part of our growing international presence, our Honorary Patron Saffron Foster (great, great granddaughter to Dame Nellie) will host a glamorous event in celebration of the Dame Nellie Melba Scholarship, at the Vestey Family Estate, Stowell Park, UK in September featuring a performance by Melba alumni currently based in London.

In closing, the much anticipated return of Amy Black – Melba's favourite leading lady – to centre stage as General Manager will occur in October, following extended maternity leave.

I feel enormously privileged to have been entrusted with keeping Melba Opera Trust on track during Amy's leave. It has been a pleasure becoming acquainted with the dedicated Melba family, the inspirational scholars and alumni, the mentors and industry friends and the hard-working Melba team and Board. Thank you all for a truly memorable tenure.

**HEROINES & ANGELS**

Tuesday 12 July, 6:00pm

Featuring:

- Zoe Drummond
- Janet Todd
- Bronwyn Douglass
- Jonathan Wilson

**MORE THAN A VOICE**

Monday 19 September, 6:00pm

Featuring:

- Shakira Tsindos
- Michael Petruccelli
- Daniel Carison
- Timothy Newton
- Sharolyn Kimmorley AM

Both performances will be in The Salon at Melbourne Recital Centre.

Tickets \$39 (\$29 concession)

Visit [www.melbournerecital.com.au](http://www.melbournerecital.com.au) for ticket bookings or call (03) 9699 3333.

## 2016 MELBA SCHOLARS

**Daniel Carison – bass-baritone**

Paulette Bisley Opera Scholarship & Ruskin Opera Award

**Bronwyn Douglass – mezzo-soprano**

Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship

**Zoe Drummond – soprano**

Dame Nellie Melba Scholarship, Patrick & Vivian Gordon Award

**Timothy Newton – bass**

Stuart Leslie Opera Scholarship

**Michael Petruccelli – tenor**

RJ & AF Hamer Opera Scholarship

**Nicholas Tolputt – countertenor**

John & Elizabeth Wright-Smith Scholarship

**Shakira Tsindos – mezzo-soprano**

Joseph Sambrook Opera Scholarship

**Simon Bruckard – repetiteur**

**Jonathan Wilson – repetiteur**

Margaret Schofield Opera Scholarship

## 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**



Bronwyn Douglass & Mary-Jane Joscelyne



Simon Bruckard, Andrew Cochrane, Jonathan Wilson



Daniel Carison with Roz & Jeremy Ruskin



Shakira Tsindos & Mary-Jane Gething

## ‘MEET THE SCHOLARS’

**We were delighted to present the extraordinary talents of the 2016 scholars at our annual *Meet the Scholars* event, presented in Melbourne and for the first time in Sydney, acknowledging our growing support base there.**

Both events were generously supported by our event partner De Bortoli Wines in the opulent dining room of The Australian Club in Melbourne and in the beautiful home of leading cardiologist Professor Anne Keogh AM in Sydney. The ‘Meet the Scholars’ events are a wonderful opportunity for us to have meaningful introductions and catch-ups and make some new friends. It’s also a rare occasion where our scholars come together to perform as a group.

Across two nights in two capital cities, over 150 supporters gathered to be introduced to and entertained by our new cohort. In Melbourne, Chair of Melba Opera Trust, Robert Logie-Smith gave a realistic update on our financial position with the ultimate goal to endow fully all scholarships and programs so the Trust may offer them in perpetuity

and secure Dame Nellie Melba’s vision for generations of talented aspiring singers to come. He also shared the success of our increased presence in Sydney with several Sydney-based occasions in the past year that have seen significant growth for the organisation.

Acting General Manager, Olivia Giglia, shared impressive news of Melba alumni, illustrating that their national and international operatic achievements are testament to the connections they have built through their time as Melba Opera Trust scholars and the invaluable support they have received from generous benefactors.

A 40-minute musical program delighted with equally rousing and moving ensemble works, as well as some masterful solo performances with full credit to our Artistic Advisor, Sharolyn Kimmorley AM for

her careful program preparation to exacting standards.

Prior to the finale, second-time scholar Daniel Carison made a speech on behalf of his fellow scholars and touched on his recent travels to Europe in seeking future opportunities:

“As a scholar I’ve been able to develop a great network of colleagues, friends, mentors and supporters all of whom have been assisting me in my journey. Melba Opera Trust has an immensely rich alumni culture and while I was overseas I had the opportunity to catch up and meet with a number of past scholars doing great things overseas. During their busy schedules Siobhán Stagg, Brenton Spiteri, Samuel Sakker and Jade Moffat all made time for a fellow scholar to grab a beer and point me in the right direction. This just goes to show that there is a real sense of family beyond the work we do here in Melbourne and Australia, and as the saying goes, ‘Once a Melba, always a Melba’.”

Daniel also offered personal thanks on behalf of the scholars to Sharolyn for not only her support in preparation and accompaniment, but the instrumental role she plays in shaping their journeys beyond their Melba scholarship.

Following the performance scholars joined guests at the reception, some meeting the benefactors of their scholarships for the first time, in a relaxed environment with a feeling of shared appreciation throughout the room.

Fast forward two weeks and ‘Meet the Scholars’ landed in Sydney. Formalities commenced with an address by Deputy Chair, Roz Zalewski-Ruskin who spoke eloquently as a benefactor and syndicate leader. Scholars Zoe Drummond, Bronwyn Douglass and Timothy Newton were accompanied by Sharolyn in a stunning recital. While all scholars couldn’t be present, a short video presentation to introduce them was shared and appreciated by guests.

In her speech, first-time scholar Bronwyn Douglass expressed thanks to Melba Opera Trust, on behalf of her fellow scholars, for help in making dreams a reality:

“For us as scholars the Trust’s support means that we can commit ourselves to continued studies, to keep working towards becoming more versatile, well-rounded performers and artists. I think that my fellow scholars would agree that Melba Opera Trust has created a wonderful, supportive environment that makes us feel confident to try new things and to explore who we could be as artists as we bridge the gap from amateur to professional.”

**We are most grateful to Professor Anne Keogh AM and Graham Finlay-Jones for graciously opening their home to our growing community of Sydney supporters and friends, for a memorable event.**

**DE BORTOLI WINES**



John & Sarah Brennan with Michael Petrucci

Rob Weir, Norma Leslie, Simon Trumble & Dot Leslie with Timothy Netwon

Scholars Timothy Newton, Zoe Drummond & Bronwyn Douglass in Sydney



Professor Anne Keogh AM & Margot, Lady Burrell

## ANNOUNCING A SPECIAL SCHOLARSHIP

**As Melba Opera Trust strives to secure a sustainable future, we are thrilled to announce a 5<sup>th</sup> fully endowed scholarship – the Paulette Bisley Opera Scholarship.**

Paulette & Warwick Bisley have been valued supporters of Melba Opera Trust since our earliest days. They are formalising their support through a fully endowed named scholarship in a way that reflects Paulette’s passion for opera, and ensuring the future for young Australian opera singers is bright.

The inaugural Paulette Bisley Opera Scholarship recipient is second-

time Melba scholar, Daniel Carison. Paulette and Warwick recently had the opportunity to catch up with Daniel at the vineyards of our event partner, De Bortoli Wines, in the Yarra Valley.

“We’re thrilled to make this scholarship available for generations of Melba scholars to come, and in 2016 we’re looking forward to following Daniel’s development throughout the year.”

**We extend heartfelt thanks to Paulette and Warwick for their generosity and support.**



Warwick & Paulette Bisley with scholar Daniel Carison



The Ladies - Shakira Tsindos, Bronwyn Douglass, Zoe Drummond

# 2016 SCHOLARS

## OUR LADIES

### Bronwyn Douglass (mezzo-soprano) Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship

While her mother and sister enjoyed pop music, Bronwyn Douglass' ambitions were towards opera:

"I have always loved singing, but pop never suited my voice. I watched a lot of Jane Powell and Deanna Durbin movies when I was growing up, and with my grandmother I watched ballet videos. I caught a snippet of Dame Joan Sutherland singing at the Sydney Opera House. From then on I wanted nothing other than to be an opera singer."

Prior to being awarded a Melba Opera Trust scholarship, Bronwyn was a finalist in the prestigious Herald Sun Aria, 2015:

"I was thrilled to have been selected as a finalist last year. I was ecstatic to perform some of my favourite arias with Orchestra Victoria, conducted by Richard Dvall AO, OBE. Nothing compares to singing French opera with an orchestra. It was pure heaven!"

Support from Melba Opera Trust means that Bronwyn can now concentrate on furthering her development, and she is clear about her aims for 2016:

"I am absolutely thrilled and honoured to have been selected as a scholar, and to become part of the "Melba family". I am especially proud to hold the Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship. I can now devote the amount of time and focus required to become a more versatile performer and artist, which I would not have been able to do without the assistance of Melba Opera Trust. Nor

would I have had the opportunities to work with so many distinguished coaches and mentors. There is so much expected of young performers these days, and I want to take this opportunity to continue to expand my knowledge and skills, including acting, movement, stagecraft and languages, as well as vocal studies. I'm also looking forward to becoming a smarter business person."

*Bronwyn holds a Master's degree in Opera Performance from the Queensland Conservatorium of Music.*

### Shakira Tsindos (mezzo-soprano) Joseph Sambrook Opera Scholarship

During her high school years, Shakira Tsindos had her sights set on studying science or speech pathology. Gradually becoming more involved with the school's music department, she was awarded the Vocal Cantor Scholarship and by the end of high school, her previous scientific aspirations faded into the distance.

Instead, she enrolled in a music degree at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. During her candidature, she became involved with Opera Scholars Australia, participated in a variety of external master classes and coaching sessions, and made a conscious effort to keep abreast of opportunities and experiences available to young singers:

"I observed that one such opportunity received by driven singers is a scholarship from Melba Opera Trust. I can hardly believe that I am now associated with such an influential and historical figure as Dame Nellie Melba. I am thrilled to be part of a group of young singers from whom I can learn, and with

whom I can collaborate. I have already been welcomed by alumni of the program with whom I have recently worked. These singers are now providing friendly faces and an incredibly supportive environment in an unfamiliar and professional performance arena. I am honoured to follow the legacy not only of Melba, but of the talented, hardworking and dedicated Melba Opera Trust alumni."

Shakira is relishing the opportunities offered in the Mentor Program, including working with mentors on vocal technique, language proficiency and stage craft. She is also "eager to learn about the many other professional qualities expected of an artist, such as etiquette, legal smarts and negotiation, and further refining the time management skills developed through my four years of study and professional performance at university".

During a Mentor Program master class earlier this year, Shakira was delighted to meet her benefactors for the first time:

"I'm humbled by the generous support of Joe Sambrook and Mary-Jane Gething in funding my development at Melba. As successful academics, they foster their love of music and opera with this wonderful scholarship. They were pleased to hear me sing for the first time in the intimate environment of Deborah Humble's master class at Cranlana, offered extremely kind words of support, and expressed their excitement at the prospect of following my journey. I am looking forward to sharing more wonderful Melba experiences with Joe and Mary-Jane."

*Shakira holds a Bachelor of Music (Hons) with from the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music at the University of Melbourne, and is a 2016 Victorian Opera Developing Artist*

### Zoe Drummond (soprano) Dame Nellie Melba Scholarship, Patrick & Vivian Gordon Award

Zoe Drummond returns to Melba Opera Trust for a second consecutive year in 2016, ready to build on the skills and experience developed through the program in 2015:

"The Trust's program provides the perfect bridge between being a student and a professional. Through the Mentor Program, I had the opportunity to strengthen both the theoretical and business aspects of being a performer, and ample performance opportunities to actually live the vocation of an opera singer. This combination is not found anywhere else."

This year, Zoe is working towards the 'big scary move overseas', learning a wide range of suitable and solid repertoire, and working hard on German language. She is also aiming to continue to develop a consistent musical technique, and to refine her business skills.

Zoe's experience with Melba Opera Trust has contributed to her recognition of the importance of philanthropic funding for young singers:

"Singing is an extremely expensive endeavour. To maintain and improve skills, you must pay for language, coaching, lessons and music resources. For self-promotion towards employment, you must have current recordings and head shots, and expect to pay for applications, auditions and accompanists. On top of all this, regular trips overseas (and perhaps eventual relocation) are necessary in order for the performer to join and remain in the worldwide opera circuit. Private funding allows young singers from all economic backgrounds the opportunity to focus on their talent, rather than having to make compromises and juggle unrelated,

part-time employment. It opens doors, strengthens skills, and enables singers to step closer to their dreams."

The 2016 diary is already looking busy. Zoe regularly performs with The 7 Sopranos, who are releasing an album during the coming year, and also with Voci Stupende. She has a few exciting performances lined up with Sydney orchestras, and of course will also be kept occupied performing in Melba Artists events.

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

## OUR GENTLEMEN

### Daniel Carison (bass-baritone) Paulette Bisley Opera Scholarship; Ruskin Opera Award

Reflecting on his time as a Melba Opera Trust scholar in 2015, returning scholar Daniel Carison has particularly valued the opportunity to design an individual program of development:

"It's important to remember that the journey to becoming an artist is very personal, requiring a great deal of understanding and self-evaluation. The Melba Opera Trust program has enabled me to tailor my development and guide my study in the direction I have felt necessary for me. Having the opportunity to hand-select teachers, language courses and other mentors has allowed me to generate my own momentum as an artist. And of course through the Mentor Program, I have been introduced to professionals who have assisted me and the other scholars in areas that will be pivotal to our success not only as musicians, but as artists and business people."



Repetiteurs - Simon Bruckard and Jonathan Wilson

## OUR REPETITEURS

### Introducing the Margaret Schofield Opera Scholarship – our 2016 Repetiteur Scholars.

*In 2016 the Margaret Schofield Opera Scholarship is supporting two repetiteur scholars. It is a fitting way for Schofield's descendants, Andrew Cochrane and Fiona Cochrane, to honour their mother's significant pianistic contribution to Melbourne and Australia. We warmly welcome Simon Bruckard and Jonathan Wilson*

*to the Melba community.*

*As Melba Opera Trust Artistic Advisor and Repetiteur Mentor, Sharolyn Kimmorley AM has pointed out, repetiteurs require skills over and above those of an accompanist, and should perhaps instead be called 'collaborative pianists'. Naturally they need good piano technique and musicality, but replicating an orchestral score on the piano is a particular art. Sharolyn will be working on this with these two young musicians throughout the year.*

**Simon Bruckard**  
*What inspired you to pursue a career*

*as a repetiteur and conductor?*

I have always been most drawn to vocal music. I accompanied classical singers at university, where I also studied languages and found that being a repetiteur is the perfect blend of these two passions. I was fortunate enough to conduct the Youth Opera and the regional tours for Victorian Opera last year. Conducting opera is a natural extension to being a repetiteur, and I love it. It's something I would like to do more of in the future, but I know I still have a lot to learn.

*You have worked already as a*



The Gentleman - Michael Petrucci, Daniel Carison, Nicholas Tolputt, Timothy Newton

The investment in young talent provided by Melba benefactors is also something that Daniel greatly appreciates:

“It’s important to allow artists the opportunity to create art, but often there is a long journey of hard work and determination that precedes success, which is why it is so necessary to invest in young talent. As a young baritone, I’ve come to terms with the fact that my voice may take time to mature, but in the meantime, there is so much that I can focus on while I continue to develop my sound. The accomplishments of the many Melba alumni currently working in Australia and overseas is a testament to the efficiency of the Melba Opera Trust program, and to those who so generously donate to it.”

At the end of 2015, Daniel undertook an overseas trip to Europe and the UK:

“It was an incredibly enlightening and inspiring trip. I had the privilege of attending a number of performances, and coaching with teachers, including Mikhail Lanskoi at the Hans Eiser Musikochschule in Berlin. I noted a deep appreciation and respect for the arts in Europe and the UK, and an incredibly high standard of performance in top opera houses and provincial theatres alike. I gained a great deal of perspective into the work ethic and drive required to be successful. It really demands your full attention and dedication, because there is a wealth of talent waiting to jump into the spotlight. Curiously enough, I didn’t feel terrified or intimidated by these expectations, but excited, motivated and committed to serving my art form by being the best artist I can be.”

Daniel is aiming to build his sound and technique as he ventures more into the cavalier baritone repertoire, to further develop his spoken language skills in German and

French, and to extend his repertoire, particularly of French music.

*Daniel holds a Bachelor of Music from the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music at the University of Melbourne and is a 2016 Victorian Opera Developing Artist*

**Michael Petrucci (tenor)  
RJ & AF Hamer Opera Scholarship**

2016 is shaping up to be a big year for Michael Petrucci. In 2014-2015, he completed the Master of Music (Opera Performance) program through Melbourne University and Victorian Opera (VO), and midway through his second year, was offered principal roles in two VO productions in 2016. He recently starred as Arturo in Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* and will perform the role of Beppe in Leoncavallo’s *Pagliacci* in August.

Michael says he has been welcomed with open arms to Melba Opera Trust, and that he feels part of a large opera family. He is looking forward to making the most of the Mentor Program and take full advantage of the various specialist coaching’s and master classes. He is particularly delighted at the prospect of working with Sharolyn Kimmorley AM:

“Sharolyn is a wonderful repetiteur with a vast knowledge of the opera repertoire, and as she is in demand around the world, she has very good insight into the world of opera in Australia and abroad.”

Michael is clear about his professional aims as a scholar in 2016:

“Talent is a component of being a successful opera singer; however, consistent, thorough hard work is the key to success in this industry. This year I am working on my vocal technique and focusing on really cementing the upper register of my voice. I will be putting part of my

scholarship money towards funding travel to Sydney to work with my singing teacher Glenn Winslade, who has been instrumental in opening up my voice over the past six months. This is my first year out of university and, as a freelance singer, I realise I also need to develop my business sense, and the need to think of myself as a small business.”

In the longer term, Michael would love to work overseas and is beginning to organise an audition tour of Europe in 2017, with Germany and the UK high on his list:

“This is quite a broad plan at this stage with much research to be done, but the thought of it all is extremely exciting!”

*Michael holds a Master of Music (Opera Performance) degree through the University of Melbourne, and is a 2016 Victorian Opera Developing Artist.*

**Nicholas Tolputt (countertenor)  
John & Elizabeth Wright-Smith Scholarship**

A second-time recipient of the John & Elizabeth Wright-Smith Scholarship, Nicholas Tolputt notes that first and foremost, his first year as a Melba Opera Trust scholar in 2015 gave him confidence:

“Regularly performing in front of an audience really focuses you on honing your craft in different ways than does study at a conservatorium – it really polishes you. So apart from many other skills, my first year gave me the confidence to go on”.

Nicholas continues to greatly appreciate the support provided by John and Elizabeth Wright-Smith:

“Because we live in different states, I don’t see them quite as often as they or I would like. But when I do see them at Melba events, they are very calming, and I love singing for them. They are supportive and caring – wonderful benefactors!”

This year Nicholas plans to focus on languages, and especially Italian, since much of the repertoire he sings as a countertenor is in Italian or English. He will also continue his work with Australian baritone Peter Coleman-Wright, whom he first approached for coaching during a Melba Opera Trust master class in Sydney in 2015.

As well as being a Melba scholar this year, Nicholas is a young artist with Pacific Opera in Sydney. He recently performed for the fourth consecutive year in the *Brisbane Baroque* festival, singing alongside former Melba alumni Morgan Balfour, Brenton Spiteri and Jacqueline Porter, in Purcell’s *King Arthur*. He also gave a recital as part of the *Baroque Bouquet* series.

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

**Timothy Newton (bass)  
Stuart Leslie Opera Scholarship**

Timothy Newton’s pathway to becoming a Melba scholar differs from that of his peers. He did not complete a degree in music, but economics and law. Nevertheless, he continued singing through his involvement with the Choir of Trinity College, where he was a Choral Scholar for the duration of his studies:

“The move from choral singer to opera singer is not without precedent – it’s more common in the UK for choral singers to take on operatic work once their voice has fully developed. I was a regular soloist, and this provided a solid grounding with which to pursue opera singing, so the progression was natural. And while a student, I sought private vocal coaching at the University of Melbourne, and teachers paid great attention to my vocal development, despite the

fact I wasn’t studying music. The transition to singing would no doubt have been more difficult without this.”

Timothy had always hoped for a career in singing, and becoming a Melba Opera Trust scholar has made that seem possible:

“It is a great honour to have been selected, and it is personally significant because I am now of a mind to pursue a career in singing in lieu of legal practice or other work. Selection as a scholar has instilled great confidence that with hard work and dedication, I can actually do it.”

The multi-faceted nature of the Trust’s program is providing Timothy with the opportunity to develop a broad range of skills:

“These include language study (principally German and Italian) and performance experience. Having neglected serious German studies since school, I am now studying it more intensively, as I’m aware of the many opportunities for young opera singers in Germany, and am very interested in that country’s culture and language. I am also continuing to work on the technical aspects of my voice, as well as style and interpretation.”

Timothy has a number of performance engagements this year including some work in oratorio, all while he continues to work as a newly-admitted legal practitioner at a small firm of solicitors. In the longer term, he is aware that “patience is required with respect to lower voices, most operatic bass roles being intended for (much) older men”. To this end, he plans to get as much performance practice as possible, and to enter various competitions that provide young singers with opportunities to work or study in Europe and elsewhere.

*repetiteur at Victorian Opera in the professional development program. What does it mean to have been selected as a Melba Opera Trust scholar?*

It’s nice to be recognised by Melba Opera Trust, because it vindicates my choice of career path, and has given me more confidence in my skills. The scholarship provides different but complementary opportunities to Victorian Opera.

*Scholarships for opera repetiteurs are rare in Australia. How important do you consider the Melba support to be?*

There is no tertiary-level course in accompanying or repetiteur training in this country. This is something that must change, particularly given the massive skills shortage in this area – so of course the Trust’s program is especially important.

*What are you hoping for in your development during your time with Melba Opera Trust?*

For me, the most valuable part of this scholarship is the opportunity to work with the mentors and learn from them. The wider Melba community is packed with generous and experienced

industry professionals. As in every organisation, its people are its most valuable asset. I am also using the scholarship money to continue to refine my language skills, which is always important.

**Jonathan Wilson**  
*What does it mean to be selected as a Melba Opera Trust scholar?*

It’s an extremely exciting opportunity to further my skills as a repetiteur and vocal accompanist. I am looking forward to benefiting from the wisdom and expertise of various mentors during the year, in particular from esteemed vocal coach and

accompanist, Sharolyn Kimmorley AM. The scholarship also gives me a great opportunity to work with some of the most talented young Australian opera singers.

*I know you particularly enjoy collaborating with singers. What role does this play in your decision to pursue work as a repetiteur?*

I have worked with singers on Lied projects numerous times in the past and I would say I have had a longstanding love and enjoyment of opera, and most of all, of the human voice.

*How valuable is the support you are*

*receiving from Melba Opera Trust?*

It’s invaluable! The opportunities to work with various mentors with first-hand experience of the profession, as well as the performance engagements and the practical exposure to the industry, are second to none in Australia.

*Do you have particular goals for your development this year?*

Furthering my skills and receiving guidance from the mentors. The scholarship will also assist me in receiving some Italian language tuition to complement my German and French language knowledge.



Chuck Hudson with the 2016 scholars

# THE ‘MELBA METHOD’

**“Liz and I have been fortunate to be able to contribute actively to the Mentor Program, a crucial part of the ‘Melba Method’”, John Wright-Smith.**

As a specialist scholarship organisation, we strive for excellence and concientiously keep the three pillars of our program in check to ensure we deliver the best possible opportunities to our scholarship receipients in preparation for the rigours of a highly competitive industry. We are especially fortunate that some innovatively minded benefactors have recognised the ‘jewel in our crown’ and key point of difference for training in the opera profession is the Mentor Program. Alongside these benefactors, we have a shared sense of determination to continually grow and develop our program content in support of Australian opera singers.

Melba Opera Trust is grateful for John & Elizabeth Wright-Smith’s generous leadership gift towards endowment of the Mentor Program, which is supported by project funding in 2016 from Joseph Sambrook & Mary-Jane Gething, Charles Allan AO, The Tallis Foundation and Opera Society Victoria. Our insightful benefactors enable us to enlist some of the most highly regarded national and international professionals from the industry as mentors to our scholars. Through attendance at private master classes, John Wright-Smith appreciates that “experience of a Melba mentor is vast and wise, and so important for the singers. Liz and I are excited to provide ongoing support.”

## STAGE-CRAFT INTENSIVES WITH MENTOR, CHUCK HUDSON

Thanks to the support of Joseph Sambrook and Mary-Jane Gething, we have been able to invite New York City Director Chuck Hudson twice in 2016. This enables the scholars to experience Chuck’s foundation curriculum on *Acting and Movement Skills for Singers* as well as his more advanced five day course on *Creating Character and Action*, and his one-on-one coachings for aria audition preparation. Scholars who have already experienced Chuck’s workshops are delighted at the prospect of a ‘double dose’ this year, as returning scholar Daniel Carison testifies:

“Working with Chuck Hudson is always a much anticipated event in the Melba Opera Trust calendar. I first worked with Chuck last year and found the five-days of intensive study and training incredibly useful. He is a great director and an incredible motivator, but what I admired most about his style

was that he was most interested in the ideas we could bring to the work as artists and performers. The sessions weren’t designed to simply choreograph a couple of arias or ensembles – they were aimed at making us more self-sufficient artists, capable of greater focus.

Reflecting on my experience last year, it is clear that what the group was able to achieve in those five days couldn’t possibly have been realised in any less time. The journey of any artist is slow – it takes patience, nurturing and time to digest all the information that is thrown our way. Just as we spend a lifetime finessing our voices, so too do we need to spend time developing our interpretational skills. I’m very excited to be working with Chuck again this year, because it will give me an opportunity to reaffirm my approach to my craft. I’m also looking forward to seeing how I’ve developed since last working with Chuck.”

*We spoke to Chuck for some insight into his sessions with the Melba scholars and for his impressions on the Mentor Program.*

“I am honoured to be returning for my sixth season as a mentor at Melba Opera Trust. This is a genuine post-conservatory/pre-professional level artist training program, which is very difficult to come by in Australia.

**There is no denying that the international artists brought in by the Trust to act as mentors creates an environment of excellence that tests a singer’s mettle in a variety of ways, helping to prepare them for the actual demands of the professional world. Rather than simply saying, ‘do you have what it takes?’, the program says, ‘this is what it takes’, and provides the dramatic and vocal tools necessary for success, which translates into the ability to create engaging, high-calibre performances.”**

Producers and directors constantly insist that singers have the same level of control over their acting abilities as a speaking actor does, or as the musician has over their musical instrument, yet rarely does any program provide singers with the tools they need to meet these demands and to be successful in this field. I present my acting and movement curriculum as a true marriage of voice, movement, and acting techniques, creating vocalisation as a consequence of movement, and movement that is nourished by vocalisation, and all of it grounded upon visually-compelling dramatic truth. This vocabulary empowers singers to move past the often cerebral experience of technique into a place of dramatic action that an audience can believe. It permits singers to become more

convincing performers by focusing their imagination on a genuine technique of unification, increasing their corporeal expression, broadening their vocal range, and deepening their ability to make dynamic acting choices without constant direction and coaching. This is what can keep opera fresh, satisfying opera lovers of now and attracting a new generation of opera lovers for our future.

Part of my initial curriculum is about building the foundation of the ensemble of singers who will work together so intensely over their tenure at the Trust. The creative process of the performer is paramount to me, both as an instructor and as a director. The development of this process comes about by the instruction of measurable skills that can be explored in a workshop setting and eventually mastered in production. I create an intensive, yet supportive, learning environment in which the advanced singer can explore specific performance techniques that they can apply immediately to focus their imagination and to become convincing dramatic performers. In the advanced series, the singers will be further exposed to text analysis skills and exercises for developing personal creativity. Using the libretto from various opera scenes, they will speak the words much as an actor would to discover the text of a play or musical. This allows singers to mine the text for the information needed to create character and action that can further inform their vocal performance.

Bettering the audition experience is a specialty in my curriculum. In the *private aria coachings*, the singer brings me selections from their audition package – generally five to six arias in several languages – and we work on them from an acting and movement perspective, applying the techniques studied in the group sessions. Singers often fail in auditions, as their performances fall somewhere between the dreaded stillness of ‘park and bark’ and the excessive proportions of ‘performance art’. At the Trust, we explore the tools singers need to prepare audition material that is both grounded in tradition and that

dares to create a unique, honest and motivated performance. I have created a three-dimensional technique designed to ‘sculpt the space’, which I have successfully employed with singers for the past 20 years. It is the ‘bang for the buck’ part of my instruction that helps the singer to stand out from the herd, to gain control over the arias no matter where they are performed, and to truly enjoy performing them again.

This ‘Cube of Space’ technique provides a genuine multi-dimensional structure that helps performers make the invisible visible by creating a grounded, motivated and honest performance, focusing imagery in ways that imprint the voice with specific dramatic action. They construct a tangible, reliable foundation, freeing them to make bold and active choices, and to become more physically expressive during the audition. The specificity of this work enlivens the audition material with bold acting choices, helping singers generate the confidence to do their best moment-to-moment work in the audition room itself.

I also believe in teaching the scholars ‘structured independence’, so that eventually they can do all of this work on their own without constant supervision. By the end of their time with me, the scholars know one another better and have already earned the trust they need from one another to risk moving beyond their present level of training and performance during the program.

**Creating and maintaining professional relationships is integral to any business, and the classical singing world is a referral business. Here again, the relationships created with the mentor artists at Melba Opera Trust can help a singer to realise their career potential.**

We mentors are all working professionals, additionally able to provide singers with the personal life skills to navigate these professional demands, which are often neglected elsewhere. I specifically remain in touch with Trust alumni when I return home to New York, and I have had the opportunity to work with them there, as well as to refer

them to professionals in other cities, and for young artist programs or Conservatory auditions in the US and Europe."

**MASTER CLASS OF GERMAN OPERA AND SONG WITH MENTOR, DEBORAH HUMBLE**

A central part of the Mentor Program, master classes provide invaluable vocal development tips, industry insights and professional network building.

The first vocal master class of 2016 was held in February at Cranlana, the magnificent Toorak mansion owned by Melbourne’s preeminent Myer family, generously hosted by Lady Southey AC. Australian expatriate mezzo-soprano Deborah Humble, now based in Hamburg, Germany, has been a past mentor and audition panel member and was thrilled to return and share her knowledge on German repertoire with Melba scholars.

Deborah shared her reflections with us about her role as a Melba Opera Trust mentor:

"My contact with two consecutive groups of Melba scholars has been very positive indeed. I’ve given master classes exploring German opera and song repertoire, and I was impressed with the attitude of all the singers. They showed such openness, and a real willingness to listen, learn and absorb. I found



them to be a truly talented group. The master class situation can be quite challenging, because it involves performing in front of peers and invited supporters. It is not easy to change technical and musical elements of a piece upon request, but I found the group extremely responsive and willing to ‘have a go’, which is so important to gain anything useful from the experience."

Once the master class concluded, scholars were fortunate to indulge in an ‘industry chat’ with Deborah over lunch, something she views as particularly important and useful for young singers:

**"I see a mentor's role as being not only a member of the profession who can offer expert advice technically and developmentally, but also someone who is capable of giving a realistic insight into the challenges of the profession.** This is particularly important in this country where students, and very often their teachers, have had no exposure or experience outside Australia. It's a competitive business, and a young,

aspiring opera singer needs to be aware of the hard work, competition and vagaries involved in pursuing an international career, as well as the joys, satisfaction and rewards. It's important to add that not all singers will go on to have international careers, despite this being something so many aspire to. It is becoming more and more possible to gain experience here in Australia, and part of the job of a mentor is to help young people explore the many vocational possibilities that are available on home soil and abroad."

Mezzo-soprano Shakira Tsindos, was delighted to sing for Deborah and learn from a master of her own voice type:

"Deborah was very supportive, greatly increasing our determination by encouraging us to be persistent. Deborah was able to provide me with extensive feedback on the piece I was singing ('Erbarme dich' from Bach's *St Matthew's Passion*), as I believe she has performed the work numerous times. It is always worthwhile hearing from coaches of the same or similar voice type,

as they seem to have a greater understanding of your instrument, and discuss your issues in a language to which you can relate. Very generously, Deborah offered me further coaching sessions while she was in Australia, which allowed us to develop further the concepts worked on in the master class. This was really beneficial. It's wonderful to find a coach who complements your technique and style."

As an Australian singer who would not have had the opportunity to experience mentor and performance programs such as those offered by Melba Opera Trust during critical developmental years post her graduate studies, Deborah comments on its benefits:

**"This program is a marvellous initiative, providing exceptional opportunities for young singers' development beyond university. I was impressed with the range of information and experience the students were receiving through the program – artistic legal matters, etiquette, stagecraft, language, and a wide range of other topics**

**that provide the necessary skills for potential entry to an opera singer's world.** The performance opportunities are also invaluable, as is contact with industry experts and professionals. Opportunities such as those offered by Melba Opera Trust have not been readily available in the past, and we should certainly encourage the continuation and development of such initiatives."

**AND TO COME IN 2016...**

We are particularly looking forward to welcoming renowned English soprano, **Dame Felicity Lott**, to give a master class to the scholars in July at Beleura House and Garden, bequeathed to the people of Victoria following the death of Jack Morton Tallis in 1996. Daniel Carison held the Beleura-Tallis Scholarship in 2015, and is looking forward to returning to the venue:

"As scholars, we have incredible opportunities to work with some of the best musicians and singers in our industry, and this year we're very fortunate to be adding Dame Felicity Lott to this impressive list. I've had the great privilege to perform at Beleura on a number of occasions, and to form a strong relationship with Tallis Foundation Director Anthony Knight, and with the regular patrons. They are an immensely generous group of people, and their investment in the arts and young talent is regularly on display at the many concerts they hold each year. My fellow Melba scholars and I are really looking forward to singing in a master class in the beautiful performance space at Beleura, complete with a world-class (Stuart) grand piano and, of course, a world-class singer."

THE DAME HEATHER BEGG MEMORIAL AWARD: A TRANS-TASMAN HONOUR

**Melba Opera Trust alumnus bass-baritone Jeremy Kleeman and New Zealand soprano Amina Edris are each recipients of a 2016 Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award.**

New-Zealand born mezzo-soprano, the late Dame Heather Begg DNZM OBE, enjoyed a long and distinguished international operatic career that instilled in her a desire to support the development of promising young Australian and New Zealand opera singers. The Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award, presented by the Trustees of her estate in association with Melba Opera Trust, was established in 2013 and is offered annually, providing access to specialised international development opportunities to young professional Australian and New Zealand opera singers.



Egyptian-born New Zealand soprano Amina Edris is a first-year San Francisco Opera Adler Fellow and a participant of the prestigious 2015 Merola Opera Program, where she performed the role of Norina in Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*. Roles in her repertory include Susanna (Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*), Serpina (Pergolesi's *La serva padrona*), Adina (Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*) and Gilda (Verdi's *Rigoletto*). Amina won the prestigious Sydney Eisteddfod McDonald's Operatic Aria Competition and the Deborah Reidel award in the Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyngé Bel Canto Award Competition in 2013, as well as being awarded a Western Regional Special Encouragement Award in the 2014 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. She holds a Bachelor of Music from the University of Canterbury, a Master of Music from the Wales International Academy of Voice, and a post-graduate diploma from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

Amina is "truly humbled and grateful to receive this award in Dame Heather Begg's honour":

"... and more so that I am the first New Zealand recipient! From the small town of Nelson to gracing the stages of Covent Garden and

the Sydney Opera House to name a few, Dame Heather's journey as a distinguished artist is nothing short of remarkable. As a young singer, the obstacles we face are often related to not being able to cover the costs of application and audition fees, and of course singing lessons and coachings – the basic stepping stones in becoming a polished and well-rounded singer. Receiving this award means I can worry less about covering expenses, and focus more on bettering myself as a singer and performer and presenting myself in the best way possible. It gives me peace of mind. I could not be more thankful!"



Jeremy Kleeman is no stranger to readers of *The Melba*, as he was a Melba scholar in 2014 and 2015, holding the Joseph Sambrook Opera Scholarship in both years.

A graduate of Victorian Opera and Melbourne Conservatorium's

Master of Opera program, Jeremy is beginning to establish himself as one of Australia's leading young bass-baritones. In 2015, he made a successful debut in the Brisbane Baroque Festival as Teobaldo in Handel's *Faramondo*. In 2014, he won the Welsh Male Choir Singer of the Year award, as well as performing Marchese d'Obigny in Verdi's *La traviata* and Rapunzel's Prince in Sondheim's *Into the Woods* for Victorian Opera. In 2013, he portrayed Albert the Pudding to critical acclaim in Victorian Opera's award-winning world premiere of Calvin Bowman and Anna Goldsworthy's operatic rendition of *The Magic Pudding*.

For Jeremy, "it is an incredible honour to have been chosen to be a beneficiary of the generous legacy of Dame Heather Begg":

"This support will be very important for me as I take my first steps on a path travelled by Dame Heather Begg herself towards an international career. I will be using the funds to take my singing to America and Europe, to further study the craft, and hopefully to learn on the job as well. I have found opera singing to be an incredibly enjoyable and rewarding career path thus far, but one that has not been

without decisions that require a bit of blind faith! Support like this gives to me the power to make my own career happen, and for that I am extremely thankful for the generosity of Dame Heather Begg, and to the adjudicators who saw in me the potential to take full advantage of this opportunity."

Amina and Jeremy were selected by long-standing colleagues of Dame Heather – Begg Estate Trustee Moffatt Oxenbould AM and Melba Opera Trust Artistic Advisor Sharolyn Kimmorley AM – and each will use their \$25,000 Award to undertake ongoing dedicated training with highly regarded international experts.

Oxenbould says "we're very proud to offer these awards to Amina and Jeremy to support in the often challenging early stages of their professional activity, as it was of utmost importance to Heather to encourage and assist emerging artists from this part of the world".

**Melba Opera Trust congratulates Amina & Jeremy, and wishes them well with their aims and ambitions this year and in the future.**



Lauren Fagan meeting Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall

## STEPPING-UP AND INTO THE SPOTLIGHT

Being called upon to take on major roles at the last minute is not uncommon for an opera singer and often contributes to furthering careers. Our alumni overseas are being called upon to step into some impressive major roles, and asked to perform for dignitaries alike. Here sopranos **Siobhán Stagg** & **Lauren Fagan** and tenor **Samuel Sakker** share some of their recent experiences, and tell us what's on the horizon.

### SHOBHÁN STAGG

At the time of writing this, I was preparing for a final performance as Sophie in Richard Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier* at the Deutsche Oper Berlin – my biggest role here to date. My parents had just arrived from Australia to see it – the first time they've seen me in a fully-staged opera, so the atmosphere was buzzing in my Berlin apartment.

'Stepping in' at the last minute has been helpful in kick-starting my career over the last two years (with two productions at the Hamburg State Opera, and concerts including Brahms' *Requiem* with Christian Thielemann and the Berlin Philharmonic, among others). The most recent case was last October, when London's Royal Opera House (ROH) asked me to take over the title role in Rossi's *Orpheus* for a co-production at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse at Shakespeare's Globe. Unlike the Monteverdi and Gluck versions of the Orpheus story, Rossi's version (1610) is much less known, so it meant learning and memorising the whole role (music, new translation and staging) from scratch within a week. Because it was such short notice, I was asked to sing the premiere and second performance from the balcony, while the singer originally cast in the role (who was suffering from laryngitis) acted the part on stage below. This happens now and then when people are ill, and can seem a bit strange at first, but after a few minutes the audience seems to forget that the voice is coming from somewhere else, and becomes absorbed in the

on-stage action. From the third show, I was on stage in costume alongside my friends, Melba alumni Lauren Fagan and Emily Edmonds. Given the nature of the piece and the short time frame, it was one of the most high-pressure projects I've done, but the reception from the London press and audience was wonderful, and has paved the way for some future opportunities which will be announced in due course!

**In the meantime, I'll return to London for the BBC Proms at the Royal Albert Hall this coming August, as the soloist in Zemlinsky's *Lytic Symphony* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Australian Simone Young. Highlights of the following season include my role debut as Gilda in Verdi's *Rigoletto* in Berlin, Blonde in Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* in Amsterdam, and Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte* in Paris.**

I'm also looking forward to joining tenor Roberto Alagna on his Australian tour in July, for concerts in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. I met and worked with Roberto in my first year as a young artist in Berlin in 2013/14, so it will be good to see him again. He's a consummate artist – a vibrant musical personality, brimming with passion in everything he sings. It will also be a lovely chance to reconnect with the Australian musical community, which has been so important in my developing years.

### LAUREN FAGAN

In February this year, I had the privilege to sing for Camilla, Duchess

of Cornwall, at St James's Palace in London. The occasion was a fundraising dinner for hospices for which the Duchess is Patron. It was a surreal experience! Not surprisingly, I had to pass through all types of security checks before even arriving at the Palace. After dinner, I sang 'Ebben ne andrò lontana' from Catalani's *La Wally*, 'Quando m'en vo' from Puccini's *La bohème*, 'Signore ascolta' from Puccini's *Turandot*, and Gershwin's 'Summertime' to finish off. The audience was extremely attentive, and after the recital, I was whizzed around to another large and beautiful room to meet the Duchess as she left the dinner. She couldn't believe we had put the program together in just one rehearsal!

**I'm also very excited to be making my BBC Proms debut later this year! I'll be singing in Vaughan Williams' *Serenade to Music* with a great group of singers for the infamous *Last Night*. And in 2017, I'm making my principal role debut as Musetta in Puccini's *La bohème* for the Welsh National Opera.**

### SAMUEL SAKKER

One morning in January this year, on my way to a rehearsal for the ROH's production of Chabrier's comic opera *L'Etoile*, I received a call asking if I'd be happy to be on standby for the role of Alfredo for the opening night of Verdi's *La traviata*. I wasn't the understudy, but had covered the role last season when it was revived by Australian director, Andrew Sinclair. There was only

a very small chance that I'd actually be needed, so I continued on happily with my rehearsal. It wasn't until later that day during a quick run-through with the assistant conductor that I was told I was actually going on.

At first I just took it in my stride, but then as we talked through the mechanics of Act 3, I couldn't for the life of me remember when Alfredo was supposed to pick up Violetta to put her in bed! It was only 15 minutes later that it really struck me I was going to be singing the lead tenor role in an opening night at the ROH. But I steeled my nerves, knowing it wasn't the first time I'd stepped in for the company. On tour with ROH to Japan last September, I was given 20 minutes' notice to replace Rollando Villazon in the concert performance of Mozart's *Requiem* with Antonio Pappano, Joyce DiDonato, Ildebrando D'Arcangelo and Albina Shagimuratova.

It was a joy to be part of this gorgeous, traditional, simple but nuanced traditional production of *La traviata*, and very exciting to be added to the esteemed list of 'Alfredo's' from this production's 22-year existence. I was completely immersed in the character and music, but also ultra-alert to what my colleagues were doing. They'd had a number of weeks of rehearsals, and had obviously developed their own interpretation, and I needed to find a way to slot in as smoothly as possible.

However, I was very happy with my performance, got a great response from the audience, the House management were very pleased with me, and I didn't drop the soprano in Act 3! And it's wonderful to have the seal of approval as a leading man in one of the world's best opera companies.

**As for what's coming up, I've been asked to return to the ROH in the 2016/17 season as Company Principal. I'm absolutely thrilled, because I really love the company and all my colleagues. As is any young singer, I'm still uncertain about the longer-term future, but I'm keeping my head down, devouring roles I'm given, preparing auditions, and finding some time for my own projects. I have my fingers crossed that the momentum I'm building will keep good things coming in.**

### A PRINCIPAL PERSPECTIVE – AN INSIGHT INTO OPERA AUSTRALIA

While international young artist opportunities seem fortuitous more so than opportunities on home soil, soprano **Stacey Alleaume** is forging her career right here in Australia for our premier opera company. In Opera Australia's recent Sydney season of Bizet's *The Pearlfishers* Stacey performed the principal role of Leila in the second set of performances. The process of taking on a major role presented her with a number of challenges, which she surmounted with professionalism and aplomb. Here Stacey recounts her interesting experience.

My experience singing the role of Leila earlier this year was an enormous and exciting learning curve. I was the understudy for the first set of performances, with Russian soprano Ekaterina Siurina singing the role. However, I was scheduled to sing the role for the first week of rehearsals until Ekaterina arrived in Australia, which turned out to be especially useful, as it provided me with the opportunity to rehearse Act I, and it was great to get on the floor. This also gave me the opportunity to work with the chorus, something you normally would not do if only taking part in rehearsals for the change of cast.

Working as an understudy can be a stepping stone in a singer's career. You are expected to be focused, determined and able to work under pressure, and to be able to deliver the best performance, often with little or no notice. So it's in your best interests to attend and observe rehearsals, even if you're not scheduled, as there's always the chance you may be required to step-in for a piano, dress or stage orchestral rehearsal.

Soon after Ekaterina arrived, she unfortunately became ill with laryngitis, and I was unexpectedly required to sing Leila. During a key rehearsal, Ekaterina realised she shouldn't continue to sing, so she motioned me over, pointed to a place in the score – at a difficult

## ALUMNA AWARDED THE ARIA

**Congratulations are due to Melba alumna Fiona Jopson for winning the 2015 Herald Sun Aria, one of Australia's most prestigious singing competitions.**

Melba Opera Trust Founding Patron Mary-Jane Joscelyne felt extremely lucky to be in the audience when 2010 Amelia Joscelyne Memorial scholar, Fiona, was announced as winner:

"From the moment Fiona sang her first aria, I felt—crossing my fingers—that it was her night. She sang

most beautifully and with enormous passion, and when they read out her name as winner, I felt full of joy and pride for her. Like many other singers, Fiona originally came from the country, based herself here in Melbourne, and applied herself with determination and an open mind to learning her craft. I admire and congratulate her, and I am so looking forward to hearing her sing again soon. 'What a voice!'

For Fiona, Mary-Jane's ongoing support is extremely valuable, sharing a special bond that has been cultivated through the Trust:

"Since 2010 Mary-Jane has been my 'Melbourne mum'—always there when I need someone to talk to. She comes to all my performances, and we make a point of catching up as often as possible. I treasure her ongoing support."

As Fiona made clear in her acceptance speech, it was particularly significant that Mary-Jane was present to witness her triumph:

"When adjudicator Merlyn Quaife OAM announced that I was the winner, I was in shock—so excited to win this prestigious award. It has

allowed me to give up my 'day job' to become a full-time opera singer, and 2016 is going to be an amazing year. I have been contracted to work with Victorian Opera and Opera Australia, and in September, I will be making my Western Australian debut in the role of Prima Donna/Ariadne in Richard Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* with OperaBox in Perth. Towards the end of the year, I will travel overseas (Italy, German, Austria, UK) to coach, undertake language classes, do auditions, and see as much opera as possible! I'm particularly looking forward to returning to Italy."

All at Melba Opera Trust join Mary-

Jane Joscelyne in congratulating Fiona on this wonderful achievement. We will be observing her career development with great interest.



Fiona Jopson and Mary-Jane Joscelyne

Herald Sun Aria final Fiona Jopson. Picture Tim Carrafa

## MARKING AMELIA'S 50<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY

**The Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship was founded 27 years ago in memory of the late Amelia Joscelyne, daughter of Melba Opera Trust founding patron, Mary-Jane Joscelyne. In 2016, Amelia would have celebrated her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, a fitting time for Mary-Jane to reflect on the nature of the scholarship and its beginnings:**

"1966 means different things to a lot of people. To us it means the year Amelia was born, along with most of her year group from Lauriston Girls School, and this year – 2016 – the majority of those girls will be turning 50, so being half a century, a lot of reflection takes place.

Amelia's year were always a group of very individual people who somehow managed to be most supportive of each other and those around them, a very endearing quality indeed! We have loved the fact we are included in their lives from time-to-time, and thank them.

The scholarship was suggested by Graham Sellars-Jones, whose daughter Kate was in that class. Bill (my late husband) and Graham were friends through The Australian Club, and Graham was Treasurer of the Melba Conservatorium of Music for many years, and so this marvellous scholarship in Amelia's name began.

The scholarship was established in 1989, through donations from many, many people, some who Amelia touched in her life, and others whom she never met. Thirty scholars have been supported through that time; not all have continued their singing,

but all have benefited from the scholarship.

Melba Opera Trust is a marvellous establishment – they do a fantastic job – and because of them, we as supporters have had the benefit of hearing these wonderful young people, through voice and piano, and we are just so lucky. I don't think we ever leave an event without a great amount of joy.

I have made many friends amongst the pupils, and with others who have set up scholarships, even another Mary-Jane\* – and of course

the people who run Melba Opera Trust. I am now waiting, waiting, waiting hopefully for one of Amelia's friend's children to pop up on the scholarship.

To all the girls who have had the scholarship, I say thank you. You didn't know Amelia. She would have been extremely excited and proud."

*[\* Refers to Professor Mary-Jane Gething, who along with her husband, Professor Joseph Sambrook, provide the Joseph Sambrook Opera Scholarship, and contribute to the Mentor Program].*

part – and asked me to take over mid-aria, which of course I did. I was put on the spot, and I felt under a lot of pressure to get everything right, but I had a lot of fun, and really felt the support of the whole company behind me.

Once the production opened, I continued with preparations for my debut. Watching from the wings, I could observe conductor Guillaume Tourniaire on the monitors, so I became really accustomed to his style, and could also hear what the orchestra and singers sounded like from the stage perspective.

Shortly after, opening night cover rehearsals began, so I rehearsed

again, this time with the cover cast. Rehearsing with multiple casts can be challenging, because although you're performing the same material, you're working with different people, and have to constantly make adjustments, demanding that you're adaptable and flexible. For the second cast, there is a scaled-back rehearsal process, so-to-speak. Fortunately, my earlier work filling in at rehearsals and working with the chorus really paid off. I felt extremely prepared, and given it was my debut in a principal role, I felt relieved to be in that position and the opening night went really well.

From the fourth show, Tahu Matheson took over as conductor, so

I had the opportunity to experience his conducting style as well, which was great. But again, with a change of conductor, you have to be flexible and aware – they may do things differently, and you just have to work with it. I felt really on the ball in the first show with Matheson, watching the monitors and watching him, trying not to make it obvious, because I knew I had to remain 'in character'.

And then in the second-last show, tenor Nikhil Navkal – playing the role of Nadir – fell ill, and Jonathan Abernethy was called in at extremely short notice to take over. I learned about this when I came off stage after Act I to find the staff madly

seeking appropriate costuming for Jonathan. Fortunately, Jonathan and I had rehearsed the roles together and there were no surprises. The performance went smoothly and was a great success. Nikhil was not well enough to do the final show either, so a quick emergency rehearsal was scheduled to do some fine-tuning and refreshing.

**For a young artist, this feels like being thrown in at the deep end – everything you could possibly think of happened – but I got an incredible amount of experience. And again, I was so grateful I had prepared well, the necessity for which was stressed during my time as a Melba Opera Trust scholar. Melba master classes**

**and workshops with international and Australian singers provided the opportunity to learn from their experiences with the unpredictable, pressured situations, helping to make them less daunting for us scholars. The resounding message I took away from these opportunities was that you need really good preparation. The more prepared you are, the less nervous you get.** I will certainly be bearing this all in mind as I prepare and rehearse my other principal roles for Opera Australia this year, Micaëla in Bizet's Carmen (July-August, Sydney), and Alexandra Mason in John's and Watkins' Sydney Opera House – The Opera (October-November, Sydney).



## HAROLD BLAIR SCHOLAR SET TO MAKE HISTORY

The ground breaking and original operatic work written by Deborah Cheetham AO, *Pecan Summer*, is set to make history this September by becoming the first Aboriginal opera to be performed at Sydney Opera House. And 2014-2015 Harold Blair Opera Scholarship recipient, Shauntai Batzke will perform as Alice in this significant performance.

For one night only, *Pecan Summer*, touted as 'a human drama like no other in the world of opera', will grace the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall stage on Monday 12 September, directed by Cameron Menzies and proudly presented by Cheetham's Short Black Opera company, which she founded in 2008.

Cheetham was instrumental in establishing the Harold Blair Opera Scholarship with Melba Opera Trust, and we wish Deborah, Shauntai and all the cast and crew of *Pecan Summer* well for their historical performance.

For ticketing information, visit [www.sydneyoperahouse.com.au](http://www.sydneyoperahouse.com.au).



Shauntai Batzke - 2014-15 Harold Blair Opera Scholarship recipient and pictured above with Deborah Cheetham AO.

## PILGRIMAGE TO THE YARRA VALLEY

**For the first time, a pilgrimage to the Yarra Valley was included in our initial Mentor Program block, enabling Melba scholars to tread Dame Nellie's ground, and providing a meaningful foundation for this important developmental year.**

The first stop was Lilydale Lawn Cemetery, the site of Melba's memorial. Here, we were hosted by John Brown, self-proclaimed 'grave keeper to the diva', and the caretaker enlisted by Melba Opera Trust to maintain Melba's gravesite, as set out in her will. Having lived in the area for a number of decades, and having personally known Melba's granddaughter, the late Pamela, Lady Vestey, John was able to share fascinating anecdotes and insights into Melba's rich and glamorous life.

The second stop was to Dame Nellie's Australian home, Coombe – The Melba Estate. Manager Daniel Johnson took the scholars on a private tour of Melba's treasured 76-acre property explaining its recent redevelopment, including an à la carte restaurant, museum and providore. In being open to the public, this venture is obviously contributing to the maintenance of Melba's memory. The scholars were also extremely fortunate to be taken beyond the hedge into Melba's cottage – a privilege bestowed upon only few, as it is still a private residence of Melba's family.

The scholars were able to stand beside Melba's piano in the intimate space of her music parlour – often the site for musical soirees she hosted for friends. A tour of the extensive gardens was then made, followed by lunch with Daniel in the restaurant.

Perfectly rounding out the day was a visit to De Bortoli Wines, our valued event partner, with whom we have enjoyed a long association. Many readers will have had the privilege of sampling their range at Melba events. Our scholars were joined at De Bortoli by a group of benefactors who have endowed named scholarships, including John & Elizabeth Wright-Smith, Professors Joseph Sambrook & Mary-Jane Gething, and Paulette & Warwick Bisley. All were taken on a private tour of the winery before enjoying a wine-tasting together.

Manager Leanne De Bortoli comments on the occasion:

"We were so pleased to be the final stop on this pilgrimage. We have enjoyed seeing – and hearing – the incredible talent of many of the scholars, fostered and nurtured by Melba Opera Trust. This wonderful organisation provides such an important stepping stone for young opera singers, and we are the lucky ones to be able to enjoy the fruits of their labour. What a thrill it must have been for them to visit this region that was home to Dame Nellie Melba. They must

have found it fascinating to visit her property, walk through her beautiful garden, and look around at the stunning scenery which, apart from a few new vineyards here and there, has remained the same. Our own admiration for Melba led us to develop some wine labels that bear her name. Our premium Cabernet-based wine range is named 'Melba' – and we'd like to think she enjoyed a glass of claret all those years ago! We also have a delightful range of aromatic wines called 'La bohème', which reflect the four Acts of this well-known opera that was one of Melba's favourites (Act 1 - Riesling; Act 2 - Pinot Rose; Act 3 - Pinot Gris and friends; Act 4 - Syrah Gamay). We were delighted to share these with Melba scholars and benefactors."

For new scholar, Bronwyn Douglass, the pilgrimage made her feel "passionate to continue to strive for excellence in all of my endeavours".

Returning scholar, Nicholas Tolputt, also gained much from the experience:

"Our Melba pilgrimage was the perfect way to really understand the wonderful legacy that Melba Opera Trust aims to continue. As a returning scholar I previously had the privilege of singing at Dame Melba's beautiful home at Coombe Cottage. This trip though, was much more private and started to help us see the complex and intelligent woman behind the music."



Melba scholars at Coombe Cottage

# A MELBA LEGACY AND A MOST VALUED MELBA

Melba Opera Trust patron, the Honourable Saffron Foster – granddaughter of previous patron, Pamela, Lady Vestey – is relishing her role of continuing the legacy of her great, great grandmother, Dame Nellie Melba. This was certainly evident in November last year, when she visited Australia, attending Melba events in Sydney and Melbourne:

"I always love coming to Australia, and it was really nice to attend the Sydney friend-raising event at Rosemont. It was very generous of Margot, Lady Burrell to offer her beautiful house and garden to Melba again – the perfect venue for a recital and soirée. There seemed to be a lot of interest from invited guests in Melba Opera Trust and its programs, which was very gratifying. The subsequent event at Coombe Cottage was also really lovely. It's very special to hear a performance by Melba scholars in the intimate space of my great, great grandmother's beautiful music room. And it always amazes me to see the progress of these talented young singers – how much they can develop through their time with Melba. I see their confidence grow – they really seem to become 'the full package'. I'm so looking forward to coming to Australia again later this year."

It was at this event at Coombe that Melba benefactors, Professors Joseph Sambrook and Mary-Jane Gething, were awarded the prestigious Melba Medal, the thirteenth recipients since 1993 in an exclusive list of valued supporters of Melba Opera Trust and its predecessor, the Melba Memorial Conservatorium of Music. Having Melba's patron in attendance made the ceremony all the more meaningful for the recipients, as Mary-Jane Gething notes:

**"Joe and I felt tremendously honoured to be awarded the Melba Medal, and it was very special to receive it in Dame Nellie's**

**music room from her great, great granddaughter. But I for one felt quite undeserving, given that the award was in-part in recognition for our 'engaging so meaningfully with the scholars'. We have already been greatly rewarded by the pleasure we receive from getting to know such talented and charming young people, and watching them develop and flourish. And this is true for all the scholars, not just our wonderful Joseph Sambrook Opera Scholars, Jeremy Kleeman and Shakira Tsindos."**

Saffron's support continues to extend beyond Australia. General Manager – soon to return from maternity leave – Amy Black is collaborating with her to organise a second event at Stowell Park in the UK:

"We're delighted to be invited back to Stowell Park for an encore event. The date is set – Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> September – and, like last time, the occasion will include a performance in the ballroom followed by a reception. It's incredibly generous of Lord and Lady Vestey to open their home in support of the Dame Nellie Melba Scholarship. It was really important for Melba herself to have the support of British arts patron Lady de Grey during her time in the UK, and it is wonderful to have this echoed by Saffron, our dynamic patron, who is the force behind this event."

With so many alumni now based in the UK and Europe, we are looking forward to featuring several in this special performance. Such occasions provide precious opportunities to support our international alumni in performing for a 'local' audience, and hopefully to extend their international audience base. We're looking forward to an evening of superb music making in celebration of Australian talent and the remarkable Melba legacy."

*Anyone who is interested in attending this Stowell Park event, should register their interest with Melba Opera Trust for further ticketing information.*

Daniel Carison & Morgan Belfour performing in Melba's music room

Mary-Jane Gething, Joseph Sambrook, The Hon. Saffron Foster, Robert Logie-Smith

## CELEBRATING THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF OUR ALUMNI

In addition to the recent and upcoming exploits of our talented alumni, there have been a number of exciting opportunities for some more of our Melbas around the globe, including the following:

**Hannah Dahlenburg** starred as Queen of the Night in Opera Australia's January production of *The Magic Flute*.

**Alexandra Flood** has recently been announced as a Studio Artist at the prestigious Wolf Trap Opera Festival in Virginia, USA – her big break into the American market.

**Nathan Lay** is the 2016 recipient of the Australian International Opera Award. Nathan will study in Wales under tenor and renowned vocal teacher, Dennis O'Neill.

**Jeremy Kleeman** performed his first professional lead role in *Voyage to the Moon*, Victorian Opera and Musica Viva's collaboration, which

toured nationally. This July, Jeremy will make his Opera Australia debut playing Figaro in Michael Gow's new regional touring production of *The Marriage of Figaro*.

**Brenton Spiteri** is currently a member of the Opéra de Lyon, France. He recently performed in the Brisbane Baroque Festival, made his

debut with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and will perform at Melbourne Recital Centre in August. Later in the year, he will perform in Haydn's *Armida* with Pinchgut Opera alongside alumna **Janet Todd**.

LETTER FROM ABROAD: EMILY EDMONDS



Dear Melba Community,

I'm writing from London, where I'm currently in the Jette Parker Young Artists Programme at the Royal Opera House. When I found out I

had been awarded a place in the Programme, it was actually one of those moments when you feel like you're living inside a dream. I kept re-reading the email to make sure I wasn't dreaming! Since then, it has been the most challenging and brilliant journey forward.

These past months in the Programme have been more incredible than I ever could have imagined. The opportunities for learning and growth provided are truly exceptional. As well as individual and group sessions in stagecraft, language, music, vocal development and movement, we sing in major productions on the main stage. Nothing can come close

to explaining the thrill of standing on the Royal Opera House stage, singing out across the orchestra and into an auditorium where people have been sharing in opera for hundreds of years.

To be a part of the Royal Opera is to be part of a family, a community of people who work tirelessly to put incredible art on the stage. When you step out on that stage, you are a tiny part of a huge operation. To sense and see the work of all the others around you, and to know you contribute in some small way to this great whole, is a profoundly inspiring feeling. Even working in the rehearsal room, I find that I am

constantly driven on to be better by all the brilliant people in the room. From conductor to language coach to stage manager, each is inspiring to watch in their element. Everyone in the rehearsal room is at the top of their game, and it is fascinating and exciting to be in this environment.

Some highlights in my first year include working with many brilliant directors and conductors on this season's productions, singing at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, and learning how to read in Russian, which has always been a major life ambition of mine! It was also wonderful to sing in a production of Rossi's *Orpheus* with not one, but two other Melba alumni – Siobhán Stagg and Lauren Fagan – proof that the wonderful musical community built within Melba is far-reaching,

and supports us throughout our careers.

I am incredibly excited about the 2016-17 season, where I will sing Kate Pinkerton in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, Tebaldo in Verdi's *Don Carlos*, and Singer in Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*. I will also cover Dorabella in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, Magdalena in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, and Emilia in Verdi's *Otello*. In addition, I'll sing Agathe and Dargelos in the Royal Ballet's production of Philip Glass's dance opera inspired by Jean Cocteau's novel *Les Enfants Terribles*.

I look forward to all the wonderful challenges ahead, and to sharing these with the Melba family all over the world.

Emily

WHEN CAN YOU HEAR OUR SCHOLARS?

Melbourne Recital Centre-Yarra Valley collaboration  
Sunday 3 July, 2pm

The Memo Hall, 235 Maroondah Highway, Healesville

Featuring: Michael Petruccelli, Shakira Tsindos, Daniel Carison – Simon Bruckard, pianist

Dame Nellie Melba at Beleura  
Wednesday 6 July, 1:30pm

Grosvenor Room - Beleura, John Tallis Drive, Mornington

A Dame Nellie Melba tribute concert – repertoire as performed by Melba.

Featuring: alumna Hannah Dahlenburg – Rhodri Clarke, pianist

Melbourne Recital Centre Salon: Heroines & Angels  
Tuesday 12 July, 6:00pm

Southbank Boulevard, Southbank

The evocative beauty of the female voice is celebrated in this wide-ranging program, from the flirtatious to the sensuous.

Featuring: Janet Todd, Zoe Drummond, Bronwyn Douglass – Jonathan Wilson, pianist

Opera in the Mansion  
Saturday 16 July, 6:00pm

Mandeville Hall, Loreto Mandeville Hall, Toorak

A wide-ranging opera and music theatre program featuring some well-known favourites and other delights.

Featuring: Zoe Drummond, Bronwyn Douglass, Timothy Newton

Bayside Resonance Music Series: An Afternoon of Opera Bayside  
Sunday 24 July, 2:15pm

St Andrew's by the Sea, Black Rock

A mixed program of favorites from the worlds of opera and music theatre.

Featuring: Jessica Boyd, Bronwyn Douglass, Nathan Lay - Simon Bruckard, pianist

All tickets \$15, children under 18 free. Refreshments via gold coin donation. Tickets available at the door.

Broadway to Buller via La Scala  
Saturday 13 August & Sunday 14 August

Visit melbaoperatrust.com.au for further information closer to the event date.

Featuring: Zoe Drummond, Bronwyn Douglass, Timothy Newton – Jonathan Wilson, pianist

Melbourne Recital Centre Salon: More Than a Voice  
Monday 19 September, 6pm

Southbank Boulevard, Southbank

An eclectic program from past to present celebrates some of Australia's finest young artists as they express the poetry, emotions and character of music.

Featuring: Shakira Tsindos, Michael Petruccelli, Daniel Carison, Timothy Newton – Sharolyn Kimmorley AM, pianist

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