

EDITION 11 SPRING 2014

HOME SWEET HOME FOR SIOBHÁN STAGG
ALUMNI NEWS: ON THE ROAD WITH OPERA AUSTRALIA
COOMBE – THE MELBA ESTATE OPENS TO THE PUBLIC
PLUS LOTS OF SCHOLAR NEWS

The Melba

Alexandra Flood performing at De Bortoli Yarra Valley

Magazine of the Melba Opera Trust

CONTENTS

- Page 2**
- A Note from the Managing Director
 - About Melba Opera Trust
 - 2014 Melba Scholars
- Page 3**
- Siobhán returns to Cranlana
 - Scholar Updates
- Page 4**
- More Scholar Updates
 - A Manic Month of Mentoring
 - Melba Mentors at Mantra
- Page 5**
- A Scholar’s Diary
 - Impressions
- Page 6**
- Away with Words: Alexandra Flood in Salzburg
- Page 7**
- On the Road
 - Dame Heather Begg Award News
- Page 8**
- Home Sweet Home
 - 2015 Audition Panel
- Page 9**
- Heroic Singers Perform for Heroic Tenor
 - Melba Artists: Bayside and Beyond
- Page 10**
- Coombe: An Iconic Landmark Opens to the Public
- Page 11**
- A Melba Medal
 - Welcome of Ross Elliott: Our Newest Director
 - De Bortoli Delights
- Page 12**
- An Evening of Opera at Stowell Park Estate



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Dame Nellie Melba Opera Trust
ABN 96 424 419 725
Suite 501 434 St Kilda Road, Melbourne VIC 3004
Phone (03) 9867 4833 Facsimile (03) 9867 3364
www.melbaoperatrust.com.au

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A NOTE FROM THE
MANAGING DIRECTOR



OUR GENERAL MANAGER AMY BLACK IS OVERSEAS – MORE ON THIS IN A MOMENT – AND THUS I HAVE THE PRIVILEGE OF WELCOMING YOU TO THIS SPRING EDITION OF THE MELBA.

While 2014 has so far provided much to celebrate, sadly we also reflect on the recent death of Trust Council member Lorraine Elliott AM. My own association with Lorraine dated back to her time as a parliamentarian with the Arts portfolio. I was struck by her passionate advocacy for the nobler things that distinguish our species: education, literature, music and the arts in general. Lorraine was another in the line of exceptional women who have featured in the history and success of Dame Nellie Melba Opera Trust.

ULTIMATELY, WE JUDGE OUR SUCCESS BY THE TRAJECTORIES OF OUR CURRENT AND FORMER SCHOLARS. IT IS GRATIFYING TO REFLECT THAT, OF THE 28 SINGERS WHO HAVE PARTICIPATED IN OUR PROGRAM OVER THE PAST 6 YEARS, 12 ARE SUCCESSFULLY ESTABLISHING THEMSELVES AS INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS AND ANOTHER 12 ARE PROFESSIONALLY ENGAGED WITH OPERA COMPANIES THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA. SEVERAL OF OUR FORMER SCHOLARS HAVE GENEROUSLY SHARED THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH THE MELBA COMMUNITY; THEIR STORIES ARE FEATURED IN THESE PAGES.

While the Trust’s major focus is the provision of elite training here in Australia, our emerging international profile is creating some exciting opportunities. To this end, General Manager Amy Black is currently in Europe and the UK meeting with leading opera houses to gather intelligence on young artist opportunities and to forge beneficial relationships for the Trust. Amy is also expanding our industry networks to recruit leading professionals to our Mentor Program.

The important associations that Amy’s groundwork is yielding highlight one of the Trust’s most valuable assets: a culture of collaboration. As an example, new alliances with several

leading Australian arts companies are in development to create exciting performance opportunities in 2015 for our young singers. Watch this space...

And speaking of precious assets, increasing the size of our endowment is a priority second only to our remit to Dame Nellie to train young singers. Of course, the two objectives are intimately entwined! Over the past 12 months, the generosity of our supporters reached new heights. While this is a resounding vote of confidence, we still have a fair way to go until our endowment is large enough to fund our programs – let alone our aspirations.

The Trust is fiercely proud of its total independence from government funding – indeed Lorraine often reminded us of the fickle nature of the public purse. As a consequence, we are vigilant for opportunities to grow our support base. In this regard, our spirited program of friend-raising in Sydney is generating a promising source of new patronage.

On another front, several individuals have arranged legacies via the *Melba’s Will* Bequest Program launched 12 months ago. Please get in touch if you would like to receive information on how you can also help to secure the future of Dame Nellie Melba Opera Trust.

In the meantime, we remain most grateful to our current and past donors and sponsors – the contents of this magazine are a testament to their investment.

Peter Garnick
Managing Director

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

SIOBHÁN

RETURNS TO CRANLANA

AMELIA JOSCELYNE MEMORIAL SCHOLAR FROM 2009-2012 SIOBHÁN STAGG, NOW AT THE OUTSET OF AN EXCITING INTERNATIONAL CAREER, IS NO STRANGER TO THE MELBA OPERA TRUST COMMUNITY. AS THE MELBA TRUST'S FIRST SCHOLAR, SHE WAS THE FIRST TO EXPERIENCE OUR UNIQUE AND EVER-EVOLVING PROGRAM, THE FIRST TO REALISE THE TRUST'S OBJECTIVE OF FEEDING INTO INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIONS, AND OUR FIRST SCHOLAR 'AMBASSADOR', INSPIRING SINGERS AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS TO BECOME INVOLVED IN OUR PROGRAM.

Currently on contract at the Deutsche Oper in Berlin, Siobhán was back downunder recently to visit family and friends, and for several singing engagements. Particularly special was a reception and soirée at Cranlana, the magnificent Toorak mansion owned by Melbourne's preeminent Myer family, generously hosted by Lady Southey AC. Exceptional donors to the Melba Trust, members of our recently-established bequest program Melba's Will and some new friends gathered in the gracious music room at Cranlana on the evening of Thursday 23 July to experience a program reflecting Siobhán's recent musical journeys and triumphs throughout Europe, and her homecoming to Australia.

Lady Southey AC warmly welcomed guests with a short history of Cranlana, and expressed her respect for our program as the next step for singers preparing to become professionals on the world stage. General Manager Amy Black introduced Siobhán, highlighting her role as a Trust 'trail-blazer' for the many outstanding recent achievements of our scholars and alumni, including, among many, our 2013 Herald Sun Aria and 2014 Royal Opera Covent Garden successes. She also acknowledged Lady Southey AC's beneficent hospitality.

Accompanied by 2013 Melba Trust Repetiteur Scholar Amir Farid, Siobhán performed a carefully-chosen musical selection – a balance of operatic arias, art song and a little jazz. Attendees had the opportunity to hear her further vocal development, and to learn something of the "whirlwind" of the singer's first season in Europe:

"I gave some 50 performances in 12 different roles on the main stage at the Deutsche Oper, as well as guest appearances for Hamburg State Opera, the Salzburg Festival and the Moscow Symphony Orchestra. It's a busy and exciting time of my life, but also incredibly demanding vocally, mentally and physically with a lot of time spent in airports!"

Siobhán is ever grateful for her time as a Melba Opera Trust scholar:

"On several occasions over this last year I found myself thinking how thankful I was for my time with the Melba Opera Trust. After all,

opportunities are only really useful if you are ready for them and can deliver the goods while coping with the challenges as required. As these exciting opportunities present themselves, I'm always so glad that I had access to the Mentor Program. Its intensity and scope afforded me countless skills which have proved invaluable in my first year working in the European opera world."



Though Siobhán sensibly took every opportunity to learn from mentor sessions, naturally there were some particular highlights:

"The public speaking workshops with Judith Field came to mind often this year. The art of introducing oneself and one's arias in concert is stepped up a level when you're speaking German for a native audience! Though nervous at the prospect, I relished the challenge and prepared my 'Spiel' remembering Judith's mantra, 'Say what you mean, and mean what you say'. Fortunately, the Berlin locals were

impressed! Another helpful element was the acting training. In the very busy German opera houses, rehearsal time can feel slim, so one must be well prepared beforehand. I often recalled Chuck Hudson's sessions on character development and role preparation, not to mention the countless voice lessons, master classes and coaching sessions the Melba Trust facilitated. I've always appreciated my involvement with Melba Opera Trust, and in my first year as a full-time professional, I feel more grateful than ever."

It should not be forgotten that, as Dame Nellie Melba herself always believed, to succeed one must be "more than a voice". A singer must take every opportunity for further development, have determination and resilience, and must work hard. One anecdote Siobhán shared on this occasion is testament to this:

"After recently winning the Prize of the International Media-Jury at the Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition in Berlin, my boss (the Operndirektor at the Deutsche Oper Berlin) said he was proud of me, and reported to my agent at the reception afterwards that he'd been impressed that I didn't get sick once all this year. This wasn't quite true – I'd had my normal share of colds and under-the-weather days, but I was able to recover quickly and continue my work, without the upper powers realising! I think that's key – it isn't about every day being perfect and easy; it's about building the tools, coping strategies, wisdom and resilience to be able to cope when you do face those inevitable challenges along the way."

The warmth of the reception Siobhán and Amir received is indicative of the relationships that continue with our alumni, and proves our fond saying, "Once a Melba, always a Melba". Melba Trust Board Chair Mr Robert Logie-Smith made some concluding remarks reflecting upon the recent achievements of our scholars and alumni.

"That's a pretty powerful indication of how important this program is to the future of opera in Australia, and it also reflects your generosity. Collectively, we have now established a program



that fosters international artists. Maintaining that quality is paramount, and we intend to continue developing robust international networks so that our scholars and alumni are supported in all aspects of their career."

If you would like to make a personal contribution, we invite you to consider a tax-deductible donation. Donations can be made online www.melbaoperatrust.com.au/support/, or by contacting us by telephone: **03 9867-4833**.

SCHOLAR UPDATES



[Photograph of Jeremy Kleeman performing in *Into the Woods* kindly provided by Victorian Opera/Jeff Busby]

JEREMY KLEEMAN

- Performed the role of Marquis D'Obigny in *La traviata* for Victorian Opera.
- Performed the role of Rapunzel's Prince in *Into the Woods* for Victorian Opera.
- Won the Welsh Male Choir's Singer of the Year competition.
- Has been cast in Victorian Opera's 2015 productions of *I puritani*, *Sweeney Todd* and *Seven Deadly Sins*.



[Photograph of Alexandra Flood in *La Cenerentola* provided by Salzburger Festspiele/Dorike Van Genderen]

ALEXANDRA FLOOD

- Sang the role of Blonde in the Salzburg Festival young artist production of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* für Kinder, and Clorinda in *La Cenerentola* für Kinder. Also covered Konstanze in *Die Entführung*.
- Performed the role of Modistin in the Salzburg Festival's new production of *Der Rosenkavalier*, directed by Harry Kupfer and conducted by Franz Welser-Möst.
- Commences a Master of Opera degree at the Munich Hochschule für Musik und Theater / Bayerische Theaterakademie in October.



[Photograph of Shauntai Batzke in *Showboat* kindly provided by The Production Company/Jeff Busby]

SHAUNTAI BATZKE

- Performed in Short Black Opera's *Pecan Summer* in Adelaide in July.
- Just completed a season of *Show Boat* with The Production Company at the State Theatre.

SCHOLAR UPDATES CONTINUED...



REBECCA GUINELLO

- Has now completed the season of over 100 performances of *La Cenerentola* in primary schools all over Victoria for the Opera Australia Schools Company.
- Completes 2014 studying in Italy with international soprano Valeria Esposito and renowned voice coach Maestro Carlo Morganti.



NIKKI HILL

- Will be appearing in ‘Melba at Coombe’ in November.
- Is working towards The Lisa Gasteen National Opera School in November.



[Photograph of Jade Moffat in *The Perfect American* provided by OperaQ]

JADE MOFFAT

- Sang in the chorus of *Otello* for Opera Australia.
- Won first prize and the audience choice award in the Joan Sutherland Award (Noosa Federation of the Arts)
- Performed the role of Diane in *The Perfect American* with Opera Queensland, as part of the Brisbane Festival.



MATTHEW REARDON

- Performed in Short Black Opera’s *Pecan Summer* in Adelaide in July.
- Was the ‘people’s choice’ award winner of the 2015 German-Australian Opera Grant.
- Competed in the Opera and Arts Support final at the Sydney Eisteddfod.
- Sang in the final of the Dame Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyng Bel Canto competition.



[Photograph of Brenton Spiteri in *The Pearl Fishers* provided by Melbourne Opera/ Matt Deller]

BRENTON SPITERI

- Was awarded second place in the Mietta Song Competition.
- Performed ‘the Author’ in Sydney Chamber Opera’s world premiere of *Mayakovsky* at Carriage Works.
- Performed the role of Nadir in Melbourne Opera’s production of *The Pearl Fishers* in September/October, conducted by Maestro Richard Dival.



STEFAN CASSOMENOS

- Performed the Grieg Piano Concerto in Townsville with the Barrier Reef Orchestra.
- Performed a solo concert at the Beethoven Festival in Bonn, Germany.
- Appeared at Port Fairy Spring Festival performing Schubert’s *Die Schöne Mullerin* with Christopher Saunders and a second concert with PLEXUS.

A MANIC MONTH OF MENTORING

FROM JULY 19 UNTIL 8 AUGUST, OUR SINGERS EXPERIENCED ONE OF THE TRUST’S MOST ACTION-PACKED MENTORING PERIODS EVER. DURING THESE THREE WEEKS, MENTOR BLOCKS 4 AND 5 OF THE SEVEN IN 2014 TOOK PLACE, WITH AN IMPRESSIVE ARRAY OF LEADING INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL ARTISTS LENDING THEIR EXPERTISE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR YOUNG ARTISTS.

Working at this pace is valuable experience in itself, providing singers with the flavour of life as a professional artist in demand. And keeping on top of the timing and requirements of the various sessions needs good organisation, which means being disciplined record-keepers and time managers – more worthy skills to develop!

Four-day Movement Workshop with Anna Sweeny

Trained in Movement, Dance, Acting and Music, Anna has over 40 years experience, having graduated from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in 1961. It is her work with singers and in opera training that has given her a unique global reputation.

Master Class at Cranlana and Private Coaching with Yvonne Kenny

Yvonne Kenny AM is an Australian soprano who has had a long and successful career in Australia and overseas, performing for opera companies such as Opera Australia, La Scala in Milan, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, the Glyndebourne Festival and the English National Opera.

Master Class (‘Audition Arias for a European opera house’) and Private Vocal Coaching Sessions with David Aronson and Sylvia Greenberg

Sylvia Greenberg has enjoyed an outstanding career as a coloratura soprano in European opera houses and on recordings. Her husband, David Aronson, is a top repetiteur at the Vienna Staatsoper and has also worked as a conductor.

Hair and Make-up with professional hair stylists and make-up artists Corinne Jones and Sharron McBeth

Private Vocal Coaching with Melba Repetiteur Scholar Stefan Cassomenos, with David Aronson observing

Five-day Movement and Interpretation Workshop with Chuck Hudson

Based in New York City, Chuck Hudson has directed award-winning opera productions at many major international companies. In addition to directing professional artists, Chuck continues to focus on his work with artists in training.

Public Speaking with Judith Field

Judith Field had a long history in education, primarily as a teacher, before creating her own business called ‘Direct Speech’. She teaches anyone and everyone how to stand up in front of a crowd and start talking.

Industry Chat with Siobhán Stagg

Siobhán Stagg was the recipient of the Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship at Melba Opera Trust from 2009 to 2012. She is currently on contract at the Deutsche Oper in Berlin, and has many local and international performing engagements.

Etiquette and Protocol with Susie Wilson

Susie Wilson has many years experience in training people from all walks of life in the finer points of etiquette and protocol and runs her own business, the Antoinette Champagne Finishing School.

Vocal Coaching with Johannes Fritzs

Johannes Fritzs is a German conductor with many years experience. He is currently Chief Conductor of the Queensland Symphony Orchestra.

MELBA MENTORS AT MANTRA

MANTRA ST KILDA ROAD IS THE LATEST JEWEL IN THE MANTRA GROUP’S CROWN. ITS 4.5 STAR FULLY-SERVICED APARTMENTS ARE BOTH LUXURIOUS AND COMFORTABLE.

Mantra St Kilda Road features designer bathrooms with large walk-in showers and the latest fit-out.

To ensure peace and quiet, windows are double-glazed to cut out all traffic noise, while sampling the delights of the city is made easy by its convenient location.

Most Melba Mentors stay at Mantra St Kilda Road, as do interstate scholars and other Opera Trust guests. The Trust has an on-going arrangement with this hotel, enabling members of the Melba community to secure a special rate. Mantra Senior Area Sales & Marketing Manager for Victoria/Tasmania, Michael Canny, explains the thinking behind the choice to partner with the Melba Trust:

“Mantra St Kilda Road aligns with the values for which Dame Nellie Melba herself was famous. We strive for exceptional attention to detail, continuously pursue excellence, and display a true tenacity of purpose.

While providing a modern, luxurious ambience, Mantra St Kilda Road celebrates the joy of artistic expression through classic art deco styling and unique artworks in every room. We offer the Trust an accommodation solution at ‘partnership’ rates throughout the year, often hosting some of the country’s finest performers.”

Regular Melba Mentor, Luxembourg-based American repetiteur, vocal coach and conductor Semyon Rozin, has stayed here for three years in a row:

“I love the place: location, space, and the friendliness and helpfulness of the staff. And of course, thanks to the special arrangements with the Trust, the costs are very reasonable.”

Mantra St Kilda Road General Manager Aaron Bond enjoyed catching up with Semyon Rozin and Melba scholar Alexandra Flood to soak up some



Mantra St Kilda Road General Manager Aaron Bond with Semyon Rozin and Alexandra Flood

spring sunshine and hear about Alexandra’s recent adventures at the Salzburg Festival.

To access your Melba rate, visit www.mantra.com.au/victoria/melbourne-and-surrounds/melbourne/accommodation/hotels/mantra-st-kilda-road/, enter your dates and type ‘Melba’ as the promotional code. Alternatively call (03) 9525 0400 or email stkilda.res@mantra.com.au. Don’t forget to mention Melba Opera Trust to secure the special rate!

A SCHOLAR'S DIARY

Melba Mentor Block 5:

Master Class/Private Vocal Coaching (Sylvia Greenberg & David Aronson)

Hair & Make-Up
Corinne Jones & Sharron McBeth

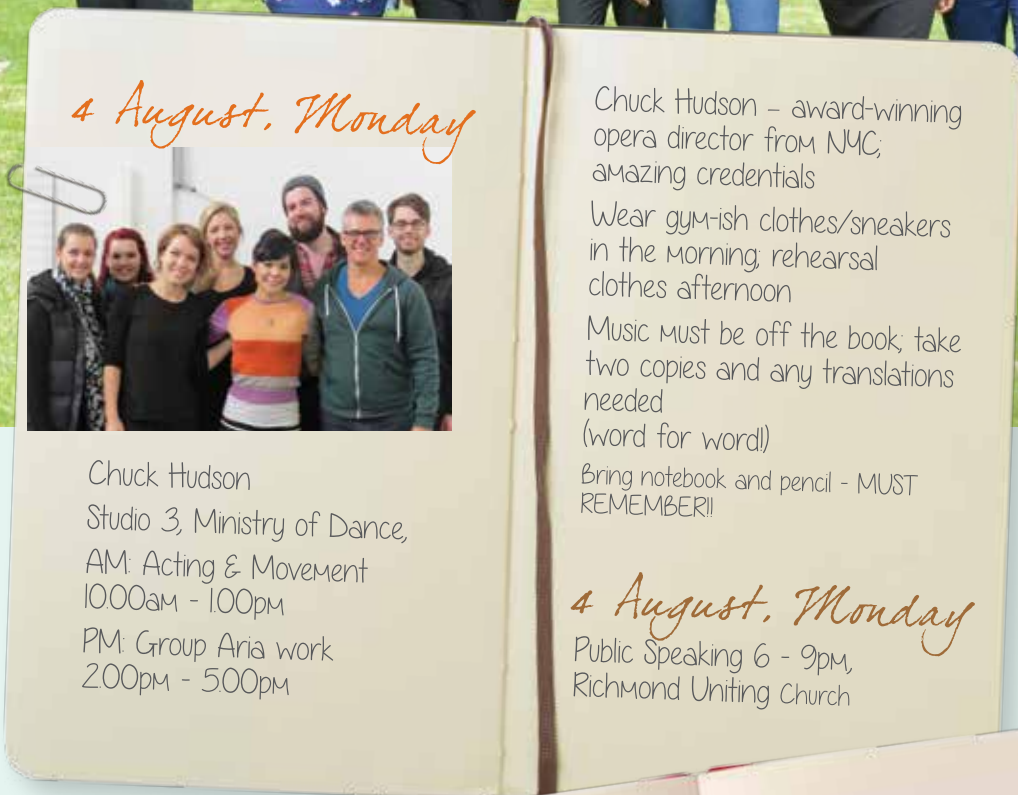
Private Vocal Coaching
Stefan Cassomenos

Movement & Interpretation Workshop
Chuck Hudson

Public Speaking
Judith Field

Industry Chat
Siobhán Stagg

Etiquette & Protocol
Susie Wilson



SCHOLARS' IMPRESSIONS



SHAUNTAI BATZKE
(SOPRANO)

"This workshop with Anna Sweeny was great. I discovered that it takes a lot of hard work to make

movement look easy and effortless! We learnt how to glide along the stage with elegance and poise, and to use gowns and capes effectively - vital information considering the costumes we often have to wear in our chosen field. We workshoped the other aspects of delivering arias - movement and acting, and I found this very effective. I also learnt the importance of being specific in thought and purpose."

"It was wonderful to learn how to apply make-up for performance, and discover that the secret to the right hairstyle is all in the preparation. It was a practical session both for the stage in for everyday attire, and it was also fun and confidence-building!"



JEREMY KLEEMAN
(BASS BARITONE)

"Sylvia Greenberg and David Aronson have a great dynamic

while working together - warm and welcoming, but ready to work on what needs to be fixed. I got a lot out of my private sessions with the two especially. I really like the private coaching setting because we can get down to basic details, whereas when there's an audience watching, I can't help but try to entertain!"



JADE MOFFAT
(MEZZO SOPRANO)

"It was really lovely to meet and chat with Siobhán Stagg about her experiences

overseas. I was surprised to find out how opera houses operate in Europe, how many shows there are each season, and how many opportunities there are for singers. Siobhán is a very inspiring young artist, and talking with her has made travelling overseas seem very appealing and exciting, as well as making some of the challenging realities of the industry very clear."

"As a Queenslander I have seen Johannes Fritzsche conduct on many occasions, so it was fantastic to have one-on-one coaching with him. I presented 'Wie du warst' from Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, which has some really difficult changes in tempo. Johannes conducted the piece for me a few times, which gave me great insight into how to tackle those difficult sections. He has an incredible knowledge of this repertoire, and I spent much of the session just soaking it in. I not only learnt a lot about the music, but about the history of the piece as well."



EMILY EDMONDS
(MEZZO SOPRANO)

"Coaching with David Aronson was a complete privilege - his approach to

working is thrilling. He has a wealth of experience and knowledge, and has a way of making music come alive. The experience of working with a coach of this calibre is for me one of the many reasons why the Melba program is at the forefront in training young artists in Australia."



CHRISTIAN GILLETT
(BASS BARITONE)

"It's always a pleasure working with Yvonne Kenny. She has the ability

to bring out the best in your voice in a way that is respectful, inspiring and completely nurturing. To work with someone who has had such an enormously successful career, but is still willing to impart her vast wealth of knowledge to help younger singers, is a gift that I treasure."



MATTHEW REARDON
(TENOR)

"Judith Field's session on public speaking was one of my favourites in 2013, so I

was eagerly awaiting working with her again in 2014, and I wasn't disappointed. She made the session enjoyable, informative and interesting, and gave me lots of new and interesting ways to introduce arias at concerts. I've tried many of her suggestions already."

"Etiquette and Protocol was a new and interesting experience for me. Susie Wilson is a very elegant and well-presented mentor. She shared many useful tips about formal dining, behaviour on social occasions, and how to be an excellent party guest!"



NIKKI HILL
(SOPRANO)

"I had always found acting rather daunting, but Chuck Hudson has changed that for me. I will never

forget his daily quotes such as, 'It's not the day nothing happened to a boring person' or, 'Any choice is better than no choice'. After completing Chuck's workshop, I feel inspired to challenge myself, and that I now have the confidence and skills to take on any opera character, big or small."

AWAY WITH WORDS:

ALEXANDRA FLOOD IN SALZBURG

Having won the Acclaim Italian Opera Awards Freemasons Victoria Fellowship, she spent the first three weeks in Jesi studying with soprano Valeria Esposito and Maestro Carlo Morganti, and then flew to Salzburg for two and a half months to take part in the Young Artists Program at the Salzburg Festival.

We caught up with her to hear about her experiences since her farewell concert in St Paul’s Cathedral on 28 May. This provided an added opportunity to learn more about the fascinating trajectory that led to her acceptance into the Young Artists Program at this prestigious festival. We discovered that she might have developed a successful career as a writer and broadcaster, but an opportunity to perform a major operatic role fixed her resolve to focus on opera singing. Our discussion revealed a young singer who is not only talented, but is clear about what she wants, determined, full of common sense, and prepared to work very hard.

I’m aware that you completed an undergraduate degree in art history and philosophy, along with a Diploma of Music at Melbourne University, and that you then studied journalism at RMIT. What led to your decision to pursue a singing career?

Towards the end of my studies at Melbourne Uni, I still wasn’t sure about the whole opera thing, and had lots of other interests. In my last six months, I did electives in creative writing, loved it, and had some prose and poetry published in respected journals. I thought, “I want to be a writer”, so I applied and was accepted to study journalism at RMIT.

Before I started that course, I travelled to Europe, and though singing wasn’t my focus on that trip, I did have a lesson with Barbara Bonney in Salzburg. She was very strict and tough, but gave me good advice, particularly regarding appropriate repertoire for my age – I was only 20. So that was my introduction to the European school of singing. I also went to the opening night of Don Giovanni in Vienna, which meant having to buy a \$2 pair of high heels, as I had packed only my hiking boots!

The course at RMIT was really ‘hands-on’ and practical, and I loved the contrast from the highly-academic writing I was accustomed to. I was drawn to broadcasting, and did an internship at Channel 9, where I produced a few ‘pieces to camera’ that I wrote myself. I also did some feature pieces, including a big article on opera for *Limelight* magazine, which led me to consider working as a freelance writer. Out of the blue about three months later, I got a call from the Program Director at ABC

Classic FM, who suggested I had the right combination of skills they were seeking. I was placed on Christopher Lawrence’s morning show as his assistant producer, so I did some programming and also some news-reading for a classical music news show, as I’d had relevant experience at Triple R. I had so much fun, and really loved it, but I’d kept up my singing, and had applied to sing in *La bohème* in Tuscany. I thought I might get into the chorus, but I got the role of Musetta!

So I dropped everything and went to Italy for three months in 2012 to sing that role, and also studied Italian for three hours every day. It was just amazing – I was totally won over. I thought, “What have I been doing? I like journalism, but I love singing!” Then I started thinking, “Okay, what can I do to help my career and get to where I want to be?” And one of the first things I thought of was Melba Opera Trust, because so many of the young Australian singers I knew who were doing really well had been associated at some point with the Melba. So I applied in 2012. I got an audition but didn’t get selected, though I got some very constructive feedback and advice on how to keep working.

The following year I decided to go to the American Institute of Musical Studies (AIMS) in Graz, and was granted the Opera Foundation Australia AIMS and AIMS Sundell Study Awards. This included tuition at AIMS for six weeks, and a generous living allowance, which I stretched out to four months because I’d done Europe on a shoestring and I knew all the tricks! AIMS was very successful for me. I worked with some amazing people, and came third in the Meistersinger Vocal Competition in Austria, which was an important moment. I also auditioned for the Salzburg Festival at that time. Then I came home, re-auditioned for Melba, and I got in!

I hear that there is a really good story around your audition for Salzburg. Can you share it with us?

I went to Salzburg to visit Siobhán Stagg, who was taking part in the Young Artists Program at the Salzburg Festival, and she urged me to audition while I was there. I was reticent, because I had no professional experience, but she told me to pull up my socks and do it, and kindly set me up with the right people to make an appointment. I auditioned the next day! Totally uncharacteristically, I got the time wrong. It was in my diary for July 22nd at 1pm, but I read 2pm. In the rabbit warren of the opera house I finally found someone to help me, and apologised profusely for my error. I sat in a waiting room for hours

COLORATURA SOPRANO ALEXANDRA FLOOD – R.J. HAMER OPERA SCHOLARSHIP HOLDER IN 2014 – WAS BACK IN MELBOURNE DURING SEPTEMBER FOLLOWING THREE MONTHS OVERSEAS FROM JUNE TO AUGUST.

twiddling my thumbs, convinced I’d blown it, until I was summoned for a rehearsal with the accompanist. Eventually the rather eccentric casting director came in. I sang Blonde’s first aria from Mozart’s *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. I was then asked to sight-read the Queen of the Night’s first aria from *The Magic Flute*, ‘Oh zittre nicht’. I’d never sung it before, so the demi-semiquaver coloratura parts weren’t great, but I’d seen *The Magic Flute* the night before, and the melody miraculously came back to me. “Hmmmmmm”, said the casting director. I was pumped with adrenalin and had nothing to lose, so I said, “You’ve got to give me a day to learn this aria. It’s not fair to ask me to sight-read this kind of coloratura!” Amazingly he agreed, so I rushed back to the hostel and set about learning it, with the help of an American baritone I was travelling with. Luckily for me it was his favourite aria! The next day I went back, and halfway through my rehearsal, the casting director burst in. I got through it, but the coloratura was a bit fudgy and the high note a little flat. There was a kind of telepathic exchange going on between the casting director and the accompanist, and then he said, “I’ll let you know in October”. I said, “You’ve got to let me do it again!” “Excuse me?” he replied. “Well you’ve walked in in the middle of my rehearsal. I’ve spent the last 24 hours madly learning this aria. I haven’t slept; it’s not fair. Let me do it”. We did it again, and it was really good. Then he said, “Welcome aboard!”

I think he probably admired your attitude as well as your singing!

It was an out-of-body experience. Everything fell into place. Being late meant I was less nervous, and it turned out they were casting for the role of Blonde! So I was taken on in that role, and as the Queen of the Night, though *The Magic Flute* was cancelled and replaced with Rossini’s *La Cenerentola* (Cinderella).

I believe you were worked extremely hard at the Festival. Can you tell us about that?

The other coloratura soprano had to withdraw because her father was ill, and another soprano cast for the role of Blonde was suffering from vocal fatigue, so I was asked to jump in a lot, often at short notice. Because of this, I was asked three days before the first music rehearsal to take on the role of Clorinda, one of the ugly stepsisters in *Cenerentola*, a perfect role for me! I also had a small role in Richard Strauss’s *Der Rosenkavalier*.

Perhaps you could tell us about the roles you played?

The Mozart was very rewarding. The conductor was Kai Röhrig, head of

opera at the Mozarteum. He’s funny, intelligent, and a great conductor. Clorinda in *Cenerentola* was rewarding in a different way, because it was so comical. The direction was very slapstick, so when we first started rehearsing, I had this character ideal – which I’d had two days to develop – of a prissy woman, and he said, “No, no, no. You guys are cavemen; you’re just absolute slobs”. Sopranos don’t usually get to be like that, so it was great fun! I had the first line of the opera, and ironically the words were “Everyone can clearly see that I’m beautiful and refined, and all men get excited just looking at me”. So the humour was in the contrast between the words and the character. The children in the audience loved it. In the Strauss, my Modistin (milliner) was just a tiny role – a couple of lines – but it was quite a challenge, because I was this little soprano on this massive stage in the opera house trying to sing over the crash of the cymbals. And the conductor wanted very articulated singing, so that was a great learning experience.

Was there a typical day for you?

There were certainly a couple of stand-out days that typified my experience. One day, I had the opening night of *Der Rosenkavalier* and then the opening night party. I got home from the party at 2am, and had to be at a master class with Thomas Hampson at 10am, so I rolled out of bed and into my cocktail dress and ran over there. It went until 1pm and I was starving because I’d not had breakfast, so I had to sneak out and grab a sausage! Then I needed to rush out at the end to get into make-up for *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. I was there for an hour, and then did the show, which was a matinée. As soon as the bows were finished, I rushed off stage to be in make-up for *Rosenkavalier* over on the other side of the opera house, and was there again for an hour. I did the show, got released after Act 1, and raced across the opera house, still in full hair and make-up, to be in a recital by Diana Damrau that finished at 10pm. Afterwards I bumped into the conductor of *Cenerentola*, who suggested we go out. That was a 15-hour day! The toughest days were when I was in two operas in one day. But there was no time to complain or have a diva moment; you just did it. It’s a cliché, but every morning I would wake up excited to start the day. And I think that kind of earnest eagerness acted in my favour, because it meant I arrived at rehearsal really bubbly and ready to go, and directors appreciate that.

What do you consider the principal things you learned from the whole experience?

Probably the biggest thing I learnt was how much difference it makes having a smile on your face and constantly being cheerful. It also reinforced for me how important it is never to be late, and to have the music fully prepared and memorised. It was obvious how valued that was, and I think I gained respect for that.

And finally, how do you feel your involvement with Melba Opera Trust prepared you for this festival?

Firstly, I didn’t get vocally fatigued the whole summer, and I think that’s because I got my technique sorted out before I got there. My funding enabled me to pay for Skype lessons with Neil Semer in New York City and to work intensively with Gary May here in Melbourne. Second, we spoke mainly German in Salzburg, and my funding paid for regular German lessons in Melbourne before I went. Third, I prepared my roles through musical coaching here in Australia, which was covered by Melba Opera Trust, not only financially, but through the people brought in for master classes, including, among others, Siro Battaglin from Opera Australia. Fourth, I had many performance opportunities with Melba in the first six months of the year, because they knew that I’d be away later. That was fantastic, because I was able to apply my learning in practice. I sang my Salzburg Festival material 100 times in public, so by the time I got there, I was quite confident with these pieces. Melba also really helped me put on my farewell concert at St Paul’s, and with the reception afterwards. Finally, it’s been really wonderful to develop a relationship with Lady Hamer – there aren’t many organisations where patrons and scholars can develop such bonds. She has been so excited to hear about my progress in Salzburg, knowing that she helped me get there, and I have loved sharing it with her.

On 27 September, Alexandra flew to Munich to begin a two-year master’s degree in opera at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater. The program is run in conjunction with the Bayerische Theaterakademie, which operates in the Prinzregententheater. She selected this program over many others she researched because it combines the benefits of the university with all of the practical training in the opera house. We wish her every success, and look forward to following her progress and hearing her sing when she next visits Melbourne.



Alexandra Flood in her dressing room during *Der Rosenkavalier*



[Photograph of Salzburg Panorama courtesy of Tourismus Salzburg]

ON THE ROAD

TAKING OPERA TO THE REGIONS IS A VERY DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE FROM PERFORMING A SERIES OF SHOWS IN A MAJOR CITY OPERA HOUSE.

Melba Opera Trust alumni Stacey Alleaume and Hannah Dahlenburg were involved in Opera Australia's recent regional tour of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* to 26 regional centres and towns, while Hannah and alumna Janet Todd sang in the same work in 'Opera on the Beach' in Coolangatta from 9-11 May this year.

We asked them about their 'on the road' experiences.

REGIONAL TOUR:

What roles did you each play, and how did you find the experience of swapping roles?

Stacey: I played Pamina and the Second Lady as well as the Priest and Chorus roles. At first it required a lot of concentration and focus, but after a few shows it became second nature. There were many entrances, exits and costume changes, but because of a thorough rehearsal period, once it launched we knew it backwards... though I do remember a moment of panic during a dress rehearsal when I thought I was wearing the wrong costume!

Hannah: I played the Queen of the Night and the First Lady. It can be confusing during rehearsals, but the Queen of the Night and the First Lady are such different characters, so it was fun exploring those differences, and certainly never boring!

You performed in many venues. Can you tell us something about the variety of performance spaces?

Stacey: They varied a lot, from dead to live acoustics, and in size (both on stage and backstage), so the set had to be adjusted to each venue. We always had a sound check and a walk over the set before each performance to get accustomed to it. Generally we performed in theatres, but other spaces were the most memorable. In Marysville we performed in a basketball stadium, and in Morundah it was a freezing pig shed! Morundah is a very small town, and when the opera comes there, it's a big event, with the locals dressed up in glam outfits, and some in beautiful furs. And they were well prepared for the cold with throw rugs and blankets! It was an amazing atmosphere, and a delight to perform for such an appreciative audience.

I feel that my three years experience in Opera Australia's Schools' Company has really taught me how to deal with constantly performing in different venues with such varied acoustics. I've learned to trust my technique and not alter anything for fear of not projecting. I no longer let the feedback or sound of a theatre throw me.

In 24 of the 26 venues on this tour, a local children's chorus was used to perform as the 'Three Spirits', animals and other chorus roles. I found it really rewarding to have the chance to help inspire the younger generation about opera and the world of theatre and the stage.

Hannah: Yes, the sports centre and the converted pig stadium were the most notable. But we performed in some stunning regional theatres as well. It's a testament to the crew we had that a wonderful performance space was always created. The set itself was incredibly flexible, so we really could fit anywhere.

The pace of the tour must have been quite fierce?

Stacey: Mostly we were only in each town for two days. There was a special crew for bump-ins and bump-outs, and the time varied of course, but typically a bump-in took 4.5 hours and the bump-out 2.5. Some venues required a rostrum to be built, which added to the time. The cast and orchestra were not expected to assist, but I was keen to help, particularly with setting up stage lighting. It meant more work for me, but it was great to work behind the scenes and see how a show is put together from start to finish. I was fortunate that the crew was willing to teach me all aspects.

Hannah: We weren't idle! By the end of the tour we had performed 33 shows across 26 venues in Victoria, NSW, ACT and Tasmania. There were only a few occasions when the bump-ins and bump-outs didn't go so smoothly, but it was lovely to see how everyone pitched in.

OPERA ON THE BEACH:

Can you share some thoughts on the experience of performing opera on a beach?

Hannah: In a word – awesome! It was still warm, and performing on the beach with the waves rolling in is a unique experience. When the fireworks went off after Pamina and Tamino passed the trials, the birds would shriek all through Papageno's aria, calming down only towards the end of the opera. You couldn't plan it any better.

The set was different to that on the regional tour. It was 25m wide, three stories high, and set on the sand near the water. As one of the Ladies, I did a lot of running but it was wonderful to have the opportunity to really fill a stage and to sing out across the beach, feeling it bounce off the rocks and through the town. We had a wonderful response from the town and from the locals who came. It was definitely a production I will remember.

Janet: It was a delight! I could hardly believe I was at work as we stood in the sand looking up at the huge set – the outside of an ancient tomb. Being near the water, we could go for a quick dip during our breaks while listening to strains of the orchestra from the waves!

The production was vibrant, funny and colourful, and set in 'Indiana Jones' style, designed by Michael Gow and Robert Kemp. It was performed in English, and through Gow's wonderful direction, the (somewhat strange) story of *The Magic Flute* was clearer than I've ever seen it portrayed. Many of the audience were locals, and they were enraptured! Beach chairs stretched far down the beach – there were 3,500 people there on the second night! There were families on picnic blankets with their children, who could play in the sand at interval. Sarastro was carried to the stage through the audience on a throne carried by eight local surf lifesavers dressed in traditional speedos and swimming caps. They were welcomed by a thunderous applause every night. I think they stole the show!

Because of the large scale of the production, our (amplified) voices, characters and staging had to be very clear and quite large so that the huge audience could connect with us. It was our job to make sure the quality of the music was still incredibly high to match the spectacle of this beachside performance. With fireworks concluding the evening, a good dose of fresh air and a quality production with excellent performers and musicians, 'Opera on the Beach' was a huge success.



[Photographs of Hannah Dahlenburg and Stacey Alleaume courtesy of Opera Australia/Albert Comper]

[Photograph of Janet Todd & Opera on the Beach courtesy of Opera Australia/Darcy Grant]



DAME HEATHER BEGG AWARD NEWS

MELBA OPERA TRUST ALUMNA JANET TODD IS THE RECIPIENT OF THE 2015 DAME HEATHER BEGG AWARD. ESTABLISHED IN THE NAME OF THE LATE DAME HEATHER BEGG, THE AWARD OFFERS EARLY CAREER ARTISTS \$20,000 TO UNDERWRITE ONGOING OPERATIC STUDY AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITHIN AUSTRALIA OR INTERNATIONALLY.

Janet has recently left for New York to undertake a master's degree specialising in opera at the Manhattan School of Music, and is honoured to have received this award:

"I'm so thrilled to be the recipient of such a special award honouring the memory of Dame Heather Begg! A proportion of the award will contribute towards fees at the Manhattan School of Music and the rest will help me

with living expenses and in funding additional training with coaches outside college in New York. Dame Heather Begg's story and character are very inspiring to me. In her memory I plan to work extremely hard, and such a generous award will greatly assist me to gain the most from these two years of intensive study!"

Congratulations Janet!



HOME SWEET HOME

“MID PLEASURES AND PALACES THOUGH WE MAY ROAM
BE IT EVER SO HUMBLE, THERE’S NO PLACE LIKE HOME!
A CHARM FROM THE SKIES SEEMS TO HALLOW US THERE,
WHICH SEEK THRO’ THE WORLD IS NOT MET WITH ELSEWHERE.”

[FROM ‘HOME SWEET HOME’ – H.R. BISHOP]



Melbourne’s elegant and refined Alexandra Club was redolent with the sentiments expressed in these words on the afternoon of Friday 24 July when around 70 guests, including the Joscelyne community, gathered together to celebrate the (temporary) homecoming of former scholar Siobhán Stagg, who studied on the Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship from 2009 to 2012. Siobhán was joined in performance by current Amelia Joscelyne scholar, soprano Rebecca Gulinello, with Associate Artist, Amir Farid, at the piano.

Following a welcome by Melba Opera Trust General Manager, Amy Black, Siobhán joined Trust Managing Director, Peter Garnick, who led a conversation intended to provide the audience with a sense of Siobhán’s journey since leaving Australia in late 2012, particularly since she joined the Deutsche Oper in Berlin in late 2013. In a dialogue peppered with amusing and interesting anecdotes, Siobhán’s busy performing schedule for the remainder of 2014, including engagements in Germany, England and Australia, was also outlined.

Set against the backdrop of the Alexandra Club’s impressive art collection, this was a warm and insightful dialogue that obviously engaged its listeners. “What came through”, according to Melba Opera Trust Founding Patron Mary-Jane Joscelyne, “was the enormous amount of work Siobhán has covered, sometimes working on six different operas in a week. It was also clear how much fun she’s having!”

A musical program of arias by Puccini, Catalani, Delibes, Charpentier, Korngold and Lehár followed and, judging by the thunderous applause, the audience was enchanted. For Rebecca, it was a particularly wonderful experience:

“I FELT SO HONOURED TO BE SINGING WITH SUCH A CALM, COLLECTED AND PROFESSIONAL SOPRANO AS SIOBHÁN STAGG, IN THE DELIGHTFUL SETTING OF

THE ALEXANDRA CLUB, AND FOR A COMMUNITY THAT SO WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUPPORTS THE ACTIVITIES OF THE MELBA OPERA TRUST. SIOBHÁN HAS A SUBLIME INSTRUMENT, AN IMPRESSIVE WORK ETHIC, AND IS SO GROUNDED DESPITE WORKING AT SUCH AN ELITE LEVEL. I CANNOT WAIT TO BE FOLLOWING IN THE STEPS OF MY PREDECESSOR AS AMELIA SCHOLAR WHEN I LEAVE AUSTRALIA FOR ITALY IN OCTOBER FOR THE FIRST LEG OF MY PROFESSIONAL STUDIES OVERSEAS. I WILL ALSO BE FOLLOWING SIOBHÁN’S SAGE ADVICE TO BE MYSELF, AND TO TAKE EVERY OPPORTUNITY AS IT ARISES!”

An impromptu performance of ‘Happy Birthday’ for Mary-Jane Joscelyne’s twin sons Matthew and Simon was a lovely gesture. But the afternoon would not have been complete without a superb rendition of ‘Home Sweet Home’. Delighted guests then gathered for afternoon tea with the artists, complete with beautiful linen, lace tablecloths and napkins, tastefully pretty teacups and dainty scones. “I am sure that Dame Nellie Melba would have approved!” remarked Mary-Jane Joscelyne.

The Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship was established in 1989 by family and friends of Melba Conservatorium student Amelia Joscelyne, late daughter of Mary-Jane Joscelyne. If you would like to make a personal contribution, we invite you to consider a tax-deductible donation. Donations can be made online www.melbaoperatrust.com.au/support/, or by contacting us by telephone: (03) 9867 4833.

LOFTY LINE-UP:

OUR 2015 SCHOLARSHIP AUDITION PANEL

THE EVER-INCREASING CALIBRE OF APPLICANTS FOR MELBA OPERA TRUST SCHOLARSHIPS IS EVIDENT FROM STAGE 1 OF THE 2015 APPLICATION PROCESS, WHICH CLOSED AT THE END OF SEPTEMBER.

Prospective applicants have submitted an application form online, together with a 200-word performance biography, a CV, a YouTube or Vimeo performance and an Artistic Development Program Proposal. The audition panel is now at work carefully assessing applications ahead of Stage 2 – live auditions and interviews to take place in November.

As ever, our panel is made up of fine artists, well able to judge the talent and potential of young singers:



Sharolyn Kimmorley AM: As Melba Opera Trust Artistic Advisor, Sharolyn chairs the Panel as usual, and is involved in Stages 1 and 2. She has enjoyed a long and distinguished career as one of Australia’s finest vocal coaches and accompanists, and is greatly in demand both in Australia and overseas.



Moffatt Oxenbould AM joins us again for Stage 1. Moffatt’s contribution to opera in Australia spans 50 years. He was Artistic Director at Opera Australia from 1984 until his retirement in 2000.



Deborah Humble is on board this year for Stage 2. A freelance mezzo-soprano, Deborah is one of Australia’s most successful international artists.



Andrea Molino is an Italian composer and conductor in great demand on the international scene. He will participate in Stage 2 of our audition process.

For more details about the Melba Opera Trust’s 2015 auditions, and if you wish to read more about our panellists, please visit www.melbaoperatrust.com.au/scholarship-application-2015/the-application-process/ and www.melbaoperatrust.com.au/scholarship-application-2015/audition-panellists/.

HEROIC SINGERS

PERFORM FOR HEROIC TENOR

A NATIVE OF NEW ZEALAND, SIMON O'NEILL HAS ESTABLISHED HIMSELF AS ONE OF THE FINEST HELDEN-TENORS ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE. HE IS A PRINCIPAL ARTIST WITH THE METROPOLITAN OPERA, THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE COVENT GARDEN, TEATRO ALLA SCALA AND BOTH THE BAYREUTH AND SALZBURG FESTIVALS, AND HAS WORKED WITH MANY WORLD-RENOWNED CONDUCTORS.

Photograph of Simon O'Neill as Otello courtesy of Opera Australia/Branco Gaica



O'Neill was in Sydney in July to perform the lead role in Verdi's *Otello*, for which his performance received rave reviews such as "tireless and thrilling", and "giving a reading of enormous panache, considerable vocal nuance, with some of the most exciting top notes you are likely to hear on the operatic stage today".

O'Neill's presence in Australia was the perfect opportunity for Melba scholars to experience his charm and great wisdom in an open master class held on Sunday 13 July. Singing on this occasion were scholars Nikki Hill (soprano), Jade Moffat (mezzo-soprano), Matthew Reardon (tenor) and Brenton Spiteri (tenor), accompanied by Opera Australia répétiteur and vocal coach Siro Battaglin. All felt that the master class was among the best they had taken part in to date.

As a member of the Opera Australia chorus for *Otello*, Jade Moffat had already seen O'Neill in action, and it turned out he was looking forward to hearing Jade sing as much as she was excited to sing for him. Jade said:

"As a young singer, I have learnt so much simply from watching other artists work, including technique, stagecraft and movement. I found Simon incredible to watch moving on stage, and I now know what people mean by 'real stage presence'."

We were thrilled to be able to hold this event at the creative home of Opera Australia – the Opera Centre – giving our guests the opportunity to experience a real working environment. Among those attending were esteemed members of the opera community, including Moffatt Oxenbould (retired Artistic Director of Opera Australia) Glenn Winslade (tenor and voice teacher), Vicki Watson (soprano and voice teacher) and Shirley Germain (widow of John Germain AM, baritone). A distinguished group of current and prospective Sydney-based supporters was also there.

Jade admitted the singers all felt a little nervous:

"But Simon put us at ease immediately by explaining that this was a working, experimental environment, and neither a performance nor a space of judgment. I felt he gave us permission to 'go for it', and to refine it as we progressed. I presented 'Se Romeo t'uccise un figlio' from Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, and we worked on creating a very even line, within a column of sound. This piece has a high tessitura for me, and Simon helped me to sing it more freely, as well as being very encouraging. It was quite liberating! His master class was one of the most inspiring and useful I've sung in and I will remember it for a long time to come."

This was the second of three events we are presenting in Sydney this year, each one providing a further chance to introduce interested Sydneysiders to Melba Opera Trust's unique program.

MELBA ARTISTS: BAYSIDE AND BEYOND

"MELBA SCHOLARS CONSTITUTE A PERFECT FIT FOR THESE BAYSIDE CONCERTS. WHY? BECAUSE THEY SING TO A HIGH STANDARD AND AS THEY ARE POISED TO LAUNCH THEIR PROFESSIONAL CAREERS, THEY ARE AT THE STAGE OF NEEDING TO ATTRACT PEOPLE WHO WILL FOLLOW THEIR CAREERS". (Dr Patricia Armstrong-Grant OBE, Melba Opera Trust Benefactor)

Dr Armstrong-Grant's words express well some of the major reasons why Melba Opera Trust's Performance Program is so integral to its unique overall schedule, and why Melba Artists Coordinator Jo Beaumont and Program Coordinator Bruce Raggatt work hard to create a variety of opportunities for our scholars to sing in public – though it's pleasing to note that this is becoming easier as demand for our artists is growing!

In August, mezzo-soprano Jade Moffat, soprano Nikki Hill and tenor Matthew Reardon, accompanied by Melba Trust Associate Répétiteur Stefan Cassomenos, performed a program titled 'Puccini & Friends' at the Italian Institute of Culture (IIC) and at 'Opera in the Mansion' at Loreto Mandeville Hall in Toorak. 'Puccini and Friends' at the IIC follows on from the very successful concert 'Verdi & Friends' held there last year. Nikki Hill's comments on her experience of performing this program demonstrate the importance and value for our singers of being exposed to different environments:

"'Puccini & Friends' was a gig to remember! I was rather taken aback

when the audience chatted in between the musical numbers. I assumed this meant that they were uninterested and bored; however I was very wrong. They insisted on an encore and gave us a standing ovation, so I assumed this was 'the Italian way'! And it was lovely to perform at Mandeville in such a beautiful building in an intimate setting for just 50 people. The feedback I received afterwards made my day: "I really believed that you were in love in the duet you sang from *La bohème*!"

Other recent opportunities include Melba scholar involvement in Mozart's *Missa Brevis K. 194* at St Francis' Catholic Church in the city; a performance at the Melbourne Club facilitated by new Melba Opera Trust Director Ross Elliott; a recital of opera at a dinner held at the Victorian Bar's Essoign Club; a series of small recitals at St Michael's Uniting Church in Collins St; and a concert of excerpts from Bizet's *Carmen* accompanied by Melbourne Sinfonia, an auxiliary of the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne and its resident orchestra.

Earlier this year, Dr Patricia Armstrong-Grant was the force behind 'An Afternoon of Opera Bayside', two recitals given by Melba scholars as part of the Bayside City Council's Resonance series at St Andrew's by the Sea Beaumaris/Black Rock Uniting Church. On April 13, current scholars Rebecca Gulinello (soprano) and Jeremy Kleeman (bass-baritone), together with alumni Nathan Lay (baritone) and Kyla Allan (mezzo-soprano) performed a varied program of arias from Mozart to Gershwin. And on July 20, current scholars Matthew Reardon (tenor) and Nikki Hill (soprano), joined by alumna Janet Todd (soprano), sang arias by Mozart, Donizetti, Massenet, Verdi, Puccini, to name a few, with some lighter songs to finish. Both occasions were accompanied by highly-respected Melbourne musician David Kram. The events were very successful, the second being completely sold out.

Dr Armstrong-Grant explains how the Melba's involvement came about: "As Chair of the Bayside Cultural Advisory Committee for several years, I canvassed continually for opera to be



Photograph of Jade Moffat at Puccini and Friends (Italian Cultural Institute) provided by Lisa Golden

included in the Cultural Action Plan, but lack of funds prevented this happening. However, my 'opera please pleas' were not forgotten, and last year Julie Skate, Gallery Supervisor of the Bayside Art and Cultural Centre, suggested that I bring opera Bayside. Naturally I wanted to feature Melba Opera Trust scholars, and I was able to speak to the audiences about the history, objectives and achievements of Melba Opera Trust. Importantly, refreshments following each concert provided our singers with invaluable networking opportunities."

To hear our singers perform at other events, please consult our webpage at www.melbaoperatrust.com.au/whats-on/



Photograph of David Kram, Nathan Lay, Kyla Allan, Rebecca Gulinello and Jeremy Kleeman performing at first Bayside Resonance Music Series - Photography - Suzy Toovey

HIDDEN BEHIND A GRAND HEDGE FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY, DAME NELLIE MELBA'S BELOVED COOMBE FARM IS NOW OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, AND A NEW CHAPTER HAS BEGUN FOR THIS AUSTRALIAN CULTURAL ICON. THE PUBLIC NEED NO LONGER BE CURIOUS. UNDER THE AUSPICES OF MELBA'S FAMILY, THE HISTORIC OUTBUILDINGS, INCLUDING THE STABLES, TACK ROOM AND MOTOR HOUSE WHERE MELBA ONCE PARKED HER DE DION-BOUTON AND ROLLS-ROYCE CARS, HAVE BEEN LOVINGLY RENOVATED.



MELBA AT COOMBE

What better way to celebrate the opening of Coombe – The Melba Estate than with music? The family of Dame Nellie Melba invites lovers of food, wine, opera and history to join them to celebrate the opening of Coombe – The Melba Estate, a stunning new restaurant and gallery facility in the grounds of Melba's home, Coombe Cottage, in the Yarra Valley Victoria.

The concert will feature many of the most familiar and popular arias and duets from the world's most beloved operas and music theatre. Performed by Melba Opera Trust Artists and accompanied by internationally acclaimed pianist **Stefan Cassomenos**.

This exclusive November concert will feature current scholars **Nikki Hill** and **Jeremy Kleeman** and guest artist **Angela Hogan** performing songs from *Carmen*, *Don Giovanni*, *La bohème*, *Lakmé*, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, *Samson et Dalila*, *Porgy and Bess*, *Les Misérables* and *Camelot*.

The ticket price of \$250 per head per evening includes the performance by our magnificent Melba artists, preceding canapés and trophy winning sparkling wine in the Melba Gallery and a three-course gourmet meal by Executive Chef Tony Milton in the new Clocktower Restaurant with matching Coombe Farm Wines.

Buses from Melbourne are available if required.

Bookings are essential.

For more information and bookings, call **Coombe – The Melba Estate** (03) 9739 0173, or visit: coombeyarravalley.com.au/.

COOMBE

AN ICONIC LANDMARK OPENS TO THE PUBLIC

As builder and keeper of Dame Nellie Melba's legacy, and with our patron now being Melba's great great granddaughter, the Honourable Saffron Foster, Melba Opera Trust enjoys a special relationship with Coombe, and is responsible for the maintenance of Melba's grave in the nearby Lilydale Cemetery. While Coombe Cottage itself and the gatehouse will remain private for use by Melba descendants, great grandsons Lord Samuel Vestey and the Honourable Mark Vestey and their progeny, Coombe Cottage and its beautiful music room continues to be available for very special private Melba Trust events featuring our scholars.

Behind the large, cypress hedge that surrounds the property, visitors can now discover a spacious and elegant, 150-seat café restaurant built with timber salvaged from the

estate, as well as a gallery and cellar door/providore curving around an ornamental Chinese elm tree. They can indulge in Escoffier-inspired dishes named in Melba's honour, such as Melba toast, Peach Melba and Melba sauce, included on the beautifully simple and seasonal à-la-carte breakfast, lunch and signature afternoon tea menus designed by French-trained, former QE2 chef Tony Milton. The menu includes produce grown on the property, such as beef, vegetables and wines, and has already been reviewed as "an outstanding dining experience". A stop at the providore and cellar door might follow, where wines, flowers, fruits and vegetables grown at Coombe Farm, as well as homemade preserves and Melba memorabilia, can be purchased to take home.

A postprandial tour, peppered with tales about Melba's lavish parties

and the history of the estate, will surely then be in order around the lush, century-old, 2.8 hectare gardens designed by William Guilfoyle, including a swimming pool built in 1913, an elm tree avenue and a glorious 19th-century oak tree. Visitors may also view and enjoy revolving exhibitions of the Dame's remarkable fashion and art, including exquisite jewellery, pristine Hermès riding boots and Cartier handbags acquired during her time living and performing in Paris. Landscape paintings of Coombe Estate by Hans Heysen painted between 1914 and 1921, and not seen in public for more than 80 years, will form part of the inaugural exhibition. Future exhibitions will include paintings by Arthur Streeton depicting the Yarra Valley and the Dandenongs, and a bearskin rug given to Melba by Charlie Chaplin.

Coombe Manager Daniel Johnson sums up the overall objectives for Coombe – The Melba Estate as follows:

"Melba was the most famous woman on the planet at the turn of the last century. She embodied glamour and fame never before seen in Australia. It's important that she and her influence are not forgotten. Our vision for the estate has been very carefully realised to continue a legacy which is very important to Melba's family, to the Yarra Valley and to Australia. It's the family's hope that by opening the estate to all, Dame Nellie Melba's story will live on."

For more information, please visit www.coombeyarravalley.com.au.

*To have been Lady Melba
from Nellie Melba
1915 -*

A MELBA MEDAL

JOHN AND ELIZABETH WRIGHT-SMITH'S ENTHUSIASM FOR MELBA OPERA TRUST'S MISSION IS ALL-ENCOMPASSING AND CONTAGIOUS.

Since shortly after launching its unique and remarkable program in 2008, the Trust has enjoyed the support of these two visionaries, whose belief in our potential has contributed significantly to the continued development of the program. They have become leaders in the Melba community, wonderful ambassadors, and loved patrons to our scholars.

A retired Consultant Physician in geriatrics with a special interest in dementia, John was introduced to opera as a boy at his father's knee, listening to some of the finest voices on the radio. At the age of six he first heard Beethoven's Minuet in G and began learning the violin. He reached Grade 6 at the age of 10 when sadly his father died and tuition ceased. Although he learned violin and not singing, John has long been convinced that "the finest musical instrument is the human voice".

Alongside her keen involvement with the Melba, Liz has been a passionate horse rider for many years. She began riding as a young child, and resumed seriously after the youngest of the couple's seven children turned four. She also enjoyed show jumping and cross country but recently has restricted herself to dressage, "with less height to fall!"

John and Liz's interest in Melba Opera Trust was sparked in 2009, when they attended a recital by Melba scholars in the riddling room at Domaine Chandon.

The power failed, and with candlelight enhancing the romantic atmosphere, John and Liz were entranced. "Our enthusiastic clapping and cheering was immediately noticed by Amy Black who was sitting behind, and we have been in her grasp ever since!" says John.

The Wright-Smiths have left their mark on every aspect of the Trust's program. They actively engage in mentoring and supporting scholars' education, and regularly attend performances, as well as hosting what has become the annual 'Wright-Smith Opera in the Arena' event on their Yarra Valley property. And of course they have directly supported scholars' artistic development with scholarship funding made available through the endowment of the Trust's first named scholarship.

In his third year as the recipient of the Wright-Smith Scholarship, tenor Brenton Spiteri expresses his gratitude:

"Whether it be making CDs for me to listen to, inviting me to their home, coming to hear my performances, or simply the hugs, smiles and kind words they provide, John and Liz have always been there for me with the most enthusiastic and unflinching support. I recently saw them at the memorial for the late Australian soprano and wonderful Melba mentor Eilene Hannan, and chatting with them was another reminder of how generous, humorous and spirited they are. It's

been a real pleasure, Wright-Smiths, and I'm looking forward to our years of friendship still to come."

It was entirely fitting, therefore, to award the 13th Melba Medal to John and Liz at the Trust's AGM held at the premises of our generous sponsors, De Bortoli Wines, in May this year. Now a time-honoured tradition, the Melba Medal is bestowed to acknowledge and pay tribute to exceptional generosity and support. The first was presented in 1993 to Joan Arnold OBE for her outstanding service as director of the Melba Conservatorium from 1975 to 1986. Recipients have included, among others, the late Alfred Ruskin AM for his leadership of the Melba Conservatorium; the late Bill Joscelyne for his leadership

as Chair, and founding patron Mary-Jane Joscelyne; founding patron and friend Pamela, Lady Vestey, and most recently to Jenny Sutherland for her 25+ years of support and championing of the Melba legacy.

John and Liz are thus in very good company and consider it a great honour to receive the Melba Medal:

"It consolidates our close association with members and supporters of the Trust and spurs us on to spread the word. It seals an exciting and wonderful future for the Trust of which we will continue to be strong supporters. It also represents the success and generosity of the large number of donors who I am sure will share this honour."



MEET OUR NEW DIRECTOR: ROSS ELLIOTT

"WE ARE DELIGHTED THAT ROSS ELLIOTT JOINED THE COUNCIL IN JULY. HIS PASSION FOR MUSIC ALONG WITH HIS EXTENSIVE PROFESSIONAL AND SOCIAL NETWORKS WILL BE WELCOME ADDITIONS TO THE BOARD TABLE."

Melba Opera Trust Council Chair, Robert Logie-Smith

Ross enjoyed a distinguished medical career that spanned over 40 years. At the time of his retirement in 2009, he was a Senior Consultant in Gastroenterology at St Vincent's Public Hospital, as well as consulting in private practice. Until early this year, Ross was also Medical Director and Owner of two Day Endoscopy Centres. His charity work has included founding and chairing the Gutsy Group, which raises \$100,000 a year for high-quality research into improving the treatment of Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis.

Now he feels he can devote more time and energy to his other passion: opera. Ross was brought up with music, his parents having sung in the local church choir for 60 years. He was also a chorister, singing as a choir boy at St Paul's Anglican Church

in East Kew for four years until his voice broke. Since that time, Ross's love of opera and classical music has gradually developed, and he attends numerous opera productions, as well as Musica Viva chamber music recitals and other performances.

A supporter of young opera singers for over 10 years, Ross brings valuable experience to Melba Opera Trust:

"My love of opera and music, together with my belief in the importance of helping young artists reach their true potential, is what draws me to Melba Opera Trust. I aim to continue the excellent stewardship of the Trust, and to contribute to the difficult task of fund-raising".

CURRENT MELBA DIRECTORS

Robert G. Logie-Smith – Chair

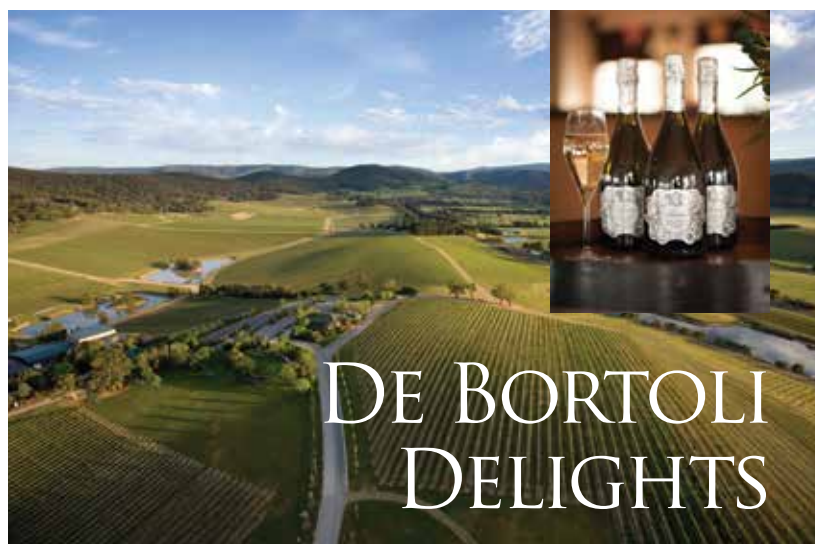
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DE BORTOLI DELIGHTS

MELBA OPERA TRUST'S RELATIONSHIP WITH DE BORTOLI YARRA VALLEY ESTATE IS ONE WE GREATLY VALUE.

As ever this year, our generous sponsor has supplied its carefully-cultivated, delicious wines for several major Melba events, including our 'Meet the Scholars' evening at the Australian Club in April, the reception and soirée featuring Siobhán Stagg at Cranlana in July, and of course at the AGM and lunch at De Bortoli on 30 May when the Melba Medal was awarded to the Melba Trust patrons John and Elizabeth Wright-Smith.

According to vineyard manager, Leanne De Bortoli, the feeling is mutual:

"We enjoy seeing the 'sparkling' new talent that is fostered and nurtured through the wonderful Melba Opera Trust. We've also had the pleasure of hearing some performers at our winery in the Yarra Valley, which was of course the much loved home of Dame Nellie

Melba. We are delighted to have been associated with Melba Opera Trust for several years now."

As many readers will know, De Bortoli's admiration for Dame Nellie led to the development of a wine label that bears her name. And the wines in this premium Cabernet-based range (Melba Reserve, Melba Mimi and Melba Lucia) are elite performers, as are our scholars. Then there's the La Bohème range in four acts (Riesling, Pinot Rose, Pinot Gris and friends, and Syrah Gamay), perfect accompaniments for special Melba occasions, or indeed for any occasion!

There's a lot happening in spring at De Bortoli. They have recently launched their own new 'sparkling' talent – the Rococo Premium Cuvée, an elegant, dry, medium-bodied wine carefully

crafted by Chief Winemaker, Steve Webber:

"While it's predominantly Chardonnay, we introduced small quantities of Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier to add a bit more breadiness and complexity. A lot of consumers enjoy the Blanc de Blancs style, but don't generally understand the term. This has been simplified with the new Rococo Premium NV Cuvée."

Importantly, the new sparkling wine is visually appealing, with a classy, brushed metallic label reminiscent of 18th-century European 'Rococo' artworks. We can't wait to try it!

Meanwhile, De Bortoli's very clever head chef, Adam Mead, has been busy devising a new spring menu, which includes such dishes as pheasant and confit duck terrine, kingfish carpaccio with blood orange, spanner crab risotto and suckling pig. There are some truly mouth-watering dishes to try. So why not plan a day in the Yarra Valley, including some wine-tasting and lunch at Locale, De Bortoli's restaurant. Corporate, private and wedding functions can also be booked there, including, of course, Christmas. For more information and bookings, please visit www.debortoliyarra.com.au.

AN EVENING OF OPERA AT STOWELL PARK ESTATE

AMY BLACK REPORTS...

ON SATURDAY 30 AUGUST, MELBA OPERA TRUST MADE ITS INTERNATIONAL DEBUT WITH *AN INTIMATE EVENING OF OPERA* AT STOWELL PARK, LORD VESTEY’S ESTATE IN THE COTSWOLDS.

An idea created and enthusiastically implemented by our patron, The Hon. Saffron Foster, the evening was an ‘invitation only’ affair with guests enjoying canapés and Coombe Farm wines in the gardens before proceeding into the grand ballroom to enjoy an hour-long soirée featuring Melba alumni Siobhán Stagg, Emily Edmonds and Samuel Sakker accompanied on piano by Susanna Stranders.

Siobhán had flown in from Berlin the day before, and both Samuel and Emily had only arrived from Australia five days earlier! A rehearsal at Royal Opera Covent Garden on the Friday evening followed by a road trip from London to the Cotswolds on Saturday gave the singers plenty of opportunity to ‘catch up’ – both socially and musically.

We arrived at Stowell Park mid-afternoon and, following a warm welcome from

Saffron and Lord Vestey, we were ushered through the magnificent halls of Stowell into a lovely chamber where a delicious afternoon tea awaited.

From the outset, the occasion was first and foremost a family affair. Over sponge cake and tea, we were introduced to Saffron’s children and the singers shared stories of their journey so far. The artists especially won the hearts of Saffron’s two youngest children Billy (2 years old) and Evie (5 years old) who sat entranced throughout the entire musical rehearsal and then proceeded to entertain us with a song or two of their own. It struck me how pleased our Founding Patron Pamela, Lady Vestey would have been to see her great grandchildren performing alongside the recipients of her grandmother’s generosity at their family’s UK estate – truly a family legacy at work. 6pm arrived all too soon, but

not before we had taken a stroll amongst the breathtaking gardens of Stowell. As you may imagine, there were more than a few ‘Downton Abbey’ anecdotes being shared!

As guests arrived, they were directed to a great terrace overlooking the rolling hills of the Cotswolds. Saffron had worked tirelessly to spread interest for the evening and the result was an impressive 110 in attendance. We were particularly delighted that James Hancock from the Tait Foundation was present and that our Melbourne friend Chris Ryan had also made the journey to enjoy this special occasion.

Following the reception, guests filled their glasses to the sounds of the *Brindisi* and took their seats in the grand ballroom. Lord Vestey welcomed attendees, explained the history behind the Vestey family, “Granny” Melba and their long-standing involvement with Melba Opera Trust. He also shared a special insight into his mother’s final wishes: that the family continue to support Melba Opera Trust and that her granddaughter carry on patronage as she, her mother and her grandmother had done before.

The musical program was a feast of operatic delights, including a breathtaking rendition by Siobhán and Samuel of ‘O soave fanciulla’ from *La bohème* and Emily’s gorgeous singing of the ‘Séguidille’ from *Carmen*. There were arias and duets performed from Mozart, Strauss, Lehár and Delibes. As a finale, all three artists joined forces to deliver a particularly sentimental performance of Granny Melba’s signature ‘Home Sweet Home’.

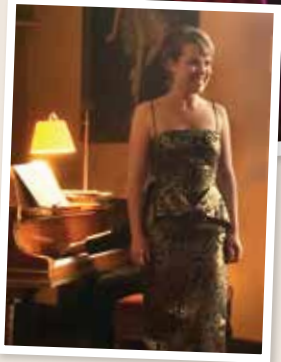
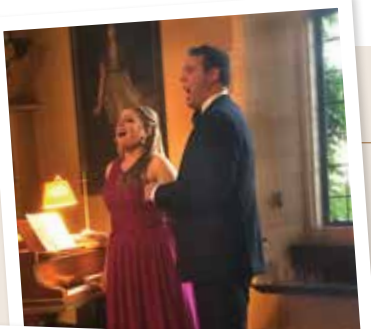
As I scanned the audience, I noted a sea of enthusiastic and warm faces genuinely thrilled at what they were hearing. Having spoken to many of the guests

before the performance, I was aware there was potential for opportunities for our alumni to develop as a result of this occasion. It struck me that in much the same way that Lady Gladys de Grey hosted soirées and receptions to help establish Dame Nellie’s career in London all of those years ago, history seemed to be repeating itself, thanks to the enthusiasm and invaluable support of the Vestey family.

Following rapturous applause, Trust Deputy Chair Roz Ruskin addressed guests on behalf of the Board, offering sincere thanks to Lord and Lady Vestey for their wonderful hospitality. Guests had asked me a lot of questions about Melba Opera Trust, and I was pleased to discover that many had visited our website and already had an understanding of our program. It was fitting, therefore, that I was given the opportunity to make some concluding remarks on Melba Opera Trust and the importance of facilitating international opportunities for the continued development of our scholars.

The evening concluded with a surprise dedication. Earlier in the formalities, Lord Vestey had proudly acknowledged his ‘half-Australian’ heritage and throughout the evening there were undertones about celebrating Australian achievement. It therefore seemed entirely appropriate that our final gesture of thanks was a stirring *a capella* rendition of ‘Waltzing Matilda’, delivered with sensitivity by Siobhán, Emily and Samuel. This was a rousing grand finale featuring an audience awash with tears!

Our sincere thanks go to Saffron and her family for their tireless efforts and warm hospitality. It was an absolute privilege



to be welcomed into the family and to work together to bring music to Stowell Park. Lady Vestey’s first words to me immediately

after the performance implied a wish for a “repeat performance”, so it is my great hope that this would be the start of another important family tradition.

Finally, I would like especially to acknowledge Siobhán, Emily and Samuel, who not only delivered an impressive performance, but were also tremendous representatives of Melba Opera Trust and of Australia generally. In a follow-up email from Siobhán, I was pleased to learn that the three artists attended a performance together of *Elektra* in London the next night. It appears our international Melba Opera Trust community continues to thrive, for in the audience they ran into none other than Melba Mentor Stuart Skelton. The ‘Melba’ world is spread far and wide!

This was indeed a successful international debut for Melba Opera Trust – bravi tutti!

Signing off from London with all best wishes,

Amy Black

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