

Ms Sandra Rogerson
7 Withers Street
ALBERT PARK VIC 3206

18 February 2026

Dear Sandra,

As we begin a new year, it is a pleasure to welcome another outstanding group of artists to the Melba Program. Each year brings with it fresh promise, and 2026 is no exception.

We are delighted to introduce eight artists: singers Sophie Blades, Jack Bolton, Sophie Hamer, Lachlan Higgins, Chloe James, Devon Lake and Aylish Ryan, together with repetiteur Zachary Hamilton-Russell. You can read more about these artists overleaf. We are pleased this year to also offer the opportunity to view our artist videos by scanning the QR code or visiting our website.

The generosity of the Melba community continues to be extraordinary, enabling us to provide these artists with the world-class training and support their talent so clearly merits. We are particularly grateful to the Opera Society for extending its support to enable a third scholarship in 2026. This will be named in honour of its former President, Valma Allaway OAM. A passionate and dedicated leader, Valma devoted her tenure to championing emerging artists. She played a pivotal role in strengthening the relationship between our two organisations.

It also gives me tremendous pride to announce the establishment of a new endowed scholarship in 2026. Longstanding champions of Melba, Nance Grant AM MBE and husband Ian Harris have established a perpetual scholarship to be known as the Nance Grant AM MBE Opera Scholarship. Nance is, of course, one of Australia's most celebrated and cherished sopranos, whose distinguished career spanned more than four decades. It is a great honour for Melba to be entrusted with her legacy and to ensure that future generations of artists are nurtured in her name. I extend my deepest appreciation to Nance and Ian for their remarkable generosity and foresight.

In a further new initiative for Melba, we look forward to the premiere of a newly commissioned work supported by the Michael Bertram Composition Award. Melbourne-based composer Lewis Ingham is currently composing a song cycle drawing on themes of ecology and family memory – a work that promises to resonate deeply with many Australians. This piece will be workshopped within the Melba Program and premiered later this year at Melbourne Recital Centre.

It is always heartening to see so many Melba Alumni forging meaningful careers in Australia and abroad, enriching the operatic profession and delighting audiences wherever they perform. This letter also marks a return to the start of that journey for a new cohort of exceptional artists.

We are thrilled to share this moment with you and to keep you connected as the stories of the Melba Artists unfold. By supporting Melba, you become part of that story from the very beginning. Thank you for sharing in the Melba journey. We remain deeply grateful.

Sincerely,



Kate Shelmerdine

Chair



Be part of
their story

To make a tax-deductible
donation scan the QR code,
call (03) 9944 2100, or visit
melbaoperatrust.com.au/support



2026 MELBA ARTISTS

Scan the QR code to watch our artist videos or visit melbaoperatrust.com.au/about/current-artists/



SOPHIE BLADES | Soprano

Nance Grant AM MBE Opera Scholarship
Eleanor Blakemore Opera Society Scholarship

Sophie Blades has just completed a Master of Music Studies (Opera Performance) from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. She has sung roles such as Eurydice (*Orpheus in the Underworld*), Adina (*The Elixir of Love*) and Theodora (*Theodora*), as well as creating the roles of Mara, Mum and Snake Skin 1 in the quadruple bill *Mother* (Sydney Conservatorium of Music and NIDA, directed by Lindy Hume). Her solo concert highlights include *Carmina Burana*, Mozart's *Coronation Mass* and *Stella Natalis* by Karl Jenkins.



SOPHIE HAMER | Soprano

The Amelia Joscelyne Memorial Scholarship

British-Australian Sophie Hamer holds a Classical Vocal Performance degree from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. Her roles include Ino (John Eccles's *Semele*), the Plaintiff Angelina (*Trial by Jury*), Mabel (*The Pirates of Penzance*) and the Dew Fairy (*Hansel and Gretel*). She has appeared as soprano soloist in *Messiah*, Fauré's Requiem, Goodall's *Invictus: A Passion* and Bach's solo cantata *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen*, as well as WA Opera's *Enchanted Encounters: Songs of the Supernatural*.



LACHLAN HIGGINS | Baritone

Paulette Bisley Opera Scholarship
Max & Jill Schultz Opera Society Scholarship

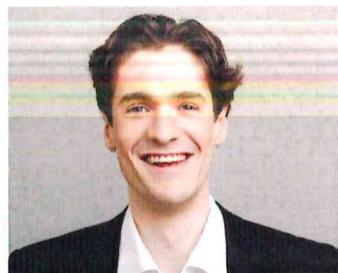
Lachlan Higgins is a graduate of Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, where he studied with Geoffrey Moses. His recent roles include Joseph De Rocher (*Dead Man Walking*), Don Giovanni, Demetrius (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and Schaunard (*La bohème*), and in Perth he has performed extensively with Freeze Frame Opera and the West Australian Opera.



DEVON LAKE | Baritone

Joseph Sambrook Opera Scholarship

Devon Lake is a graduate of the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. His WAAPA performances included leading roles in *The Enchanted Pig*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, Viardot's *Cinderella* and *Gianni Schicchi*, and he received the 2025 Richard Gill Award. He has appeared as a soloist in the Perth Rotary Vienna Pops Gala, and Bach's Mass in G and Mozart's Requiem (UWA Choral Society). In 2026–27 he joins the West Australian Opera Wesfarmers Young Artist Program.



JACK BOLTON | Bass

Ryman Healthcare Opera Scholarship
Annie McFarling Opera Scholarship
John & Elizabeth Wright-Smith Scholarship

Jack Bolton holds a Classical Voice Performance degree from the Queensland Conservatorium. His solo appearances include Mozart's Requiem (Queensland Symphony Orchestra's Sing with the Orchestra) and Paul Mealor's *Coronation Kyrie* (Melbourne Symphony Orchestra). For Brisbane's Voxalis Opera, he has sung Masetto (*Don Giovanni*) as well as Giorgio Talbot and Sir Gualtiero Raleigh in the Donizetti adaptation, *The Two Queens*. Jack was the 2024 recipient of the Southern Cross Soloists' Margaret Schindler Vocal Scholarship and a prize winner in the 2023 and 2025 National Liederfest.



ZACHARY HAMILTON-RUSSELL | Repetiteur

Margaret Schofield Opera Scholarship
Southey Sheldmerdine Repetiteur Scholarship

Zachary Hamilton-Russell completed his Bachelor of Music (Honours) degree at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, where he majored in classical piano performance, studying with Max Cooke OAM. He has collaborated with singers from companies such as Victorian Opera and Melbourne Opera, accompanied groups like the Australian Boys Choir, and worked with students from the major tertiary music institutions around Melbourne. He is also a church musician, currently serving as the Director of Music and Organist at St John's Toorak.



CHLOE JAMES | Mezzo-soprano

Jo Horgan & Peter Wetenhall Opera Scholarship
Valma Allaway Opera Society Scholarship

Chloe James is a graduate of the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music with degrees in Classical Voice and Opera Performance, and an alumna of Opera Scholars Australia. Her performing credits include the title role in *Hansel and Gretel* and Second Lady in *The Magic Flute* (Melbourne Conservatorium); *Boojum!*, *English Eccentrics*, *Parrwang Lifts the Sky* and *The Grumpiest Boy in the World* (Victorian Opera); and the premiere in 2025 of *Eva* by Stefan Cassomenos (Port Fairy Spring Music Festival).



AYLISH RYAN | Mezzo-soprano

Dame Nellie Melba Scholarship
Patrick & Vivian Gordon Award
John Wegner AO Opera Scholarship

Hailing from Toowoomba, Aylish Ryan completed a Bachelor of Music degree at the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University, graduating with distinction. She was a Lisa Gasteen National Opera Program artist in 2023 and 2024, and in 2025 she joined the Opera Queensland Young Artist Program. Role highlights include Orfeo (Gluck) in *Underworld: An Operatic Journey to Hell and Back*, Ruth in *The Pirates of Penzance* and the Mistress of the Novices in *Suor Angelica*.

