

# **THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA**

**Report by NARELLE FRENCH, 2002/1 Churchill Fellow**

**The Dame Roma Mitchell Churchill Fellowship  
for Excellence in the Performing Arts  
to research renowned Young Artist operatic training programmes  
in the United States and the United Kingdom.**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

To investigate and research renowned Young Artist operatic training programmes in the United States and United Kingdom.

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Signed:

Dated: 20 February 2003

**18 January – 11 February: United States**

**Houston Grand Opera**

- Patrick Summers - Music Director
- Diane Zola – Director, Houston Grand Opera Studio *Houston Grand Opera Guild Chair*  
Richard Bado - Head of Music Staff and Music Director, Houston Grand Opera Studio *The Schissler Foundation Chair*
- The 2002 Houston Grand Opera Studio Artists, including Kristin Reiersen *Mr. and Mrs. Robert J. Bruni Fellow*, Angela Niederloh *Philip and Denise Bahr Fellow*, Aaron Judisch, and Joshua Winograde *Dr. and Mrs. Franklin Rose Fellow*.

**Curtis Institute of Music, Philadelphia**

- Mikael Eliason - *Opera and Voice Coach, Head of Vocal Studies*

**Academy of Vocal Arts, Philadelphia**

- K. James McDowell - Director

**Metropolitan Opera, New York**

- Gayletha Nichols - Director, Lindemann Young Artist Program
- Susan Webb – Prompter, coach, pianist, teacher

**Manhattan School of Music, New York**

- Gordon Ostrowski – Opera Studio Manager

**Mannes College, New York**

- Joseph Colaneri, Director of Opera

**Hecht Studio, New York**

- Joshua Hecht – Principal and Master-teacher
- Donna Balson – Principal, teacher and performer

### **11 February – 28 February: United Kingdom**

#### **Royal Opera, Covent Garden, London**

- Tisi Dutton – Director, Vilar Young Artist Programme
- David Gowland - Director of Music Preparation and Senior Coach, Vilar Young Artist Programme

#### **English National Opera, London**

- Nicholas Selman, Company Manager

#### **Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester**

- Alexander Crowe - Head of Opera and Vocal Studies
- Stefan Janski - Director of Opera Studies

#### **London – other professional contacts**

- Amanda Thane - singer and teacher, London
- Antony Gray – coach, conductor and pianist, London

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Early in 1999 I made a radical change in my life and career. Together with my Queensland-raised husband I moved to Brisbane to join Opera Queensland where my former Opera Australia colleague and friend, Jillianne Stoll, was Head of Music. Having had the opportunity to work for Opera Queensland several times both under its own auspices and that of Opera Australia over the past decade, I was excited to observe the development of its recently reinstated Young Artist Program under Jill's leadership. In turn she was more than willing to utilise the skills I could bring and to allow me to direct them specifically towards the training of Opera Queensland's Young Artists. Following a fruitful workshop I had visited to present, plans evolved almost completely out of the blue to make my presence in the company a more regular one. Suzannah Conway, then General Manager of Opera Queensland, was likewise extremely positive about this prospect.

As a long-term member of Opera Australia's full-time music staff, I welcomed the opportunity to direct my energy to a new and focussed working area at the same time as adding a further level of credibility to its already well-regarded programme. The Queensland Conservatorium, long regarded as the acme of tertiary singing training in Australia (as witness the number of fine Australian singers who had already graduated from its courses) also offered the creation of a new coaching position within their post-graduate course. So it was that in February 1999 my husband and I packed up our lives in Sydney, farewelled our friends and numerous colleagues from the opera company, and set out for a new beginning in Brisbane.

It was to be a new beginning in more ways than one. Just over one year later, a week after returning from a visit to Sydney where I had been invited by Sharolyn Kimmorley to work once again as continuo player and principal repetiteur with British conductor Dr Jane Glover, this time on Opera Australia's renowned production of Handel's *Julius Caesar*, our first child (Stephanie) arrived. As we had planned, my husband took on the role of full-time parent while I continued at the Conservatorium and Opera Queensland where I was becoming increasingly excited by the possibilities that the combination of fine young voices and such training had to offer. In Opera Queensland's case this programme was sponsored by generous companies and individuals in such a way that it allowed the activities to be tailored to produce optimal development in each Young Artist. Opera Australia, themselves possessing a very well-pedigreed Young Artist Program, provided a very different set of opportunities to the young professional than those of Opera Queensland and in the following couple of years with the approval of current Chief Executive Chris J. Mangin I assisted Jill in building and varying aspects of the programme until I took over its running more fully from mid-2000 when she took a year's maternity leave to begin her own family.

Urged on by friends and other professionals and by my own recognition of the possibilities, I applied in early 2001 for a Churchill Fellowship myself, hoping to capitalise on the perfect opportunity to implement any research I could undertake within the fertile environment of this programme. Although at times almost overwhelmed by the responsibilities and time commitment demanded by such a programme, the thought of combining the results of such a trip with a living, growing programme was far too tempting not to try for. Around the same time as I learned I was under consideration for the final selection, I was faced with the likelihood that I would be undertaking such a venture with a baby anywhere from 6 weeks to 9 months old, depending on when I left, and therefore that my husband and daughter would necessarily be travelling with us as well. Shortly after came the devastating news (or so it felt at the time – I remember putting the phone down and bursting into tears in front of confused visitors to whom I could not yet divulge the reason) that Jill had decided not to return to her position as Head of Music at Opera Queensland when her maternity leave ended and that I would therefore be needing to apply for it myself if I wished to take up the position.

This I did, having elected n very firmly not to take up the acting position 12 months previous due to my own heavy work and family commitments, but now seeing no other alternative if I was to continue the work I was wanting to do. Shortly after learning that I was to be awarded the position I left for Hobart where I had been invited to conduct the Tasmanian Conservatorium's production of *Così fan tutte* - a very rewarding experience with these enthusiastic young performers, as it turned out, although not one I'd have accepted had I known half of the circumstances that by now were to take place.

During the time I was there, away from my family and with its newest member soon to arrive, the almost simultaneous occurrences of the Ansett collapse, leaving me with no certain return flight to commence my new Head of Music position, and September 11's tragic events combined to make the idea of plans for overseas air travel on New Year's Eve, which was the date that would need to be our departure due to my new responsibilities at Opera Queensland, less than appealing. In addition to personal safety concerns, many of the airline schedules between Australia, the States and Britain were curtailed and it quickly became impossible to obtain flights. This was complicated by the new difficulty of being absent from my position. The now inflexible return date meant shortening my study programme by 3 weeks (omitting much-anticipated visits to the Lyric Opera of Chicago and San Francisco Opera, both of which have Young Artist training programmes held in the highest regard throughout the operatic world) and compressing other planned activities, all of which was naturally disappointing.

The corollary to all of this was that the new baby (Nicholas) chose to make his grand entrance not a week early like his sister, as we were hoping, but a week late. Fortunately he (and I) quickly established the best of health, which was a relief, but the complications this caused with a delayed passport application and airline bookings added an unlooked-for extra element of haste. Finally on 17 January, having worked solidly throughout Christmas and New Year to prepare for 7 weeks' absence so soon into a new position and with the 2002 opera season looming (fortunately as the lucky parent of a baby who didn't mind sharing long hours at work with me as well as an accepting employer who didn't mind a baby sharing the office) that we set off, perspiring with the effort of managing two infants, luggage bulging with borrowed coats and boots and what we hoped were the bare necessities for a northern hemisphere winter. Overlaying all the effort and anxiety was the joyful expectation of the experiences awaiting me, anticipation of the contacts I was to meet and the consciousness of representing an elite association of high achievers.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Upon re-reading the introduction for the umpteenth time I decided to leave it as it had flowed from my fingers. Nevertheless, it barely begins to describe the experiences of many years of working with wonderful colleagues in NSW, Victoria, WA and Queensland, at Opera Australia and other organisations, or privately, and without which the development which has allowed me to gain such recognition could never have taken place. The operatic community, like any family at times capable of well-documented ambition and rivalry, are also fiercely loyal and unbelievably generous when one of their own requires assistance.

There are a great many people who have helped, encouraged and inspired me and to whom I owe much appreciation:

I have mentioned above Sharolyn Kimmorley of Opera Australia (now also guiding young opera singers at the Sydney Conservatorium, University of Sydney); I must restrict myself to adding Moffatt Oxenbould who was at the artistic helm of Opera Australia during almost all of the 13 years I worked there full-time as any list of the wonderful colleagues and true friends there who have influenced and informed my work could only be woefully inadequate.

Other Churchill Fellows who, now or previously, gave inspiration and practical advice - Amanda Thane (through whom I first became aware a decade ago of the Trust, and whose own career is now so directed toward the training of young singers that I was delighted to include some time with her in London discussing her findings as an unexpected addition to my own project); the afore-mentioned Jillianne Stoll, whose 1992 Churchill visit to the UK I was fortunate enough to coincide with and benefit from myself; Susan Lorette Dunn, a Queensland singer who has investigated and confirmed so many of the ideas I am constantly seeking to improve or instigate in Young Artist training; Nicole Dorigo, the extraordinarily committed language coach whose uncompromising standards have reinforced my own desire to see not just working professionals but also students understand what language means to communication and to integrity as a performer; Queensland conductors, accompanists and all-round musicians Sandra Milliken and Lorraine Fuller whose enthusiasm and energy is having an immeasurably positive impact on operatic and other musical communities in South-East Queensland and who deserve much recognition for their talents and commitment; other Fellows including Meg Kiddle, Nerissa Pearce, Christine Douglas, Joanna Cole, Kate Young and Tanya Simons— their example has provided guidance and encouragement.

Next, my husband Keith and long-suffering family who have taken the back seat so many times to my work commitments and aspirations and given unconditional understanding and support on innumerable occasions.

For personal or professional support, advice and shared contacts in Australia and abroad leading up to and/or during my Fellowship special thanks also go to Donna Balson and Joshua Hecht, Marc Burkhalter, Antony Gray, Rebecca Collins, Samantha and Daryl Gallagher-Collins, Greg Massingham, David Harper, Richard Gill, Joseph Ward, John Woods, Chris J. Mangin and the staff of Opera Queensland. While specifically visiting overseas companies and institutions, David McCane, Emily Wieland, Ralph Batman, Caren France, Siri Fischer Hansen, Gail Waters were some of the administrators and assistants who kindly facilitated meetings and attendance at events.

Nadine Phillips of Qantas, the Trust's patient and efficient Business Travel advisor in Brisbane, for making the last-minute arrangements at a difficult period for air-travel. To Suzanne Bath of Qantas between Sydney and Los Angeles, friend and also flight attendant extraordinaire, for making what seemed the longest and most crowded flight in the world far more bearable!

Finally and very importantly, the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust as a body and individually, with particular thanks to Paul Tys and Meg Martin for their help, advice and patience, to Noel Milliken for his support of my project and general interest in young performers through the Queensland Conservatorium, and respectfully to Dame Roma Mitchell herself, even though for the first time she was not able to learn who would benefit so greatly from her legacy. It was and is my hope to live up to the honour and responsibility of obtaining and now continuing the dissemination of this knowledge.

### **Travel, arrival and Houston**

My first place of study, as it happened, was to be extremely memorable. For this reason I have chosen to concentrate more fully throughout the report on the information and experiences of my stay in Houston, Texas as representative of the American part of my Fellowship.

The city itself, to the casual visitor, can only be described as daunting in its dimensions. This is not to say that New York or London are not but Houston possesses a completely different quality. It is seriously impressive and at the same time quite forbidding. The transport problems seem enormous if one is without a car.

Accommodation, too, is ferociously expensive with no option to find something reasonable - or at least that was my experience. The city itself only seems to exist during business hours - no convenience store located anything less than a lengthy bus-ride away. Or, rather, an expensive taxi-ride away - really, there is no public transport to be had out of hours. Unfortunately, the Theater District - despite its claim of having the largest number of theatre seats (12,948) in a concentrated downtown area outside Broadway – is also located in the centre of the city and therefore miles from any other amenities. The time I spent in Houston was undoubtedly the least economical part of the whole trip.

For this reason it was all the more wonderful to find that my interaction with the HGO management, staff and artists was also one of the most inspiring experiences and a worthy beginning to my journey of discovery.

Before embarking on a description of my visit to Houston Grand Opera, it is worth taking a moment to digress and mention some of the aspects of international travel post-11 September 2001. Even for domestic trips within the States, check-in times had been extended to almost international lengths to allow for the thorough searches that the new security restrictions demanded. Being a family with two very small children and of quite benign appearance did not exempt us from the possibility of being targeted. Rather, as foreigners, we discovered that our travel documents had been marked in advance and that we were to be searched at every point of our domestic travel in the U.S., right down to having the baby's stroller pulled apart and every bag emptied. Given that our travel was in the most part undertaken in seriously cold climatic conditions and the fact that we were carrying a good deal of equipment relevant to travelling with young children the added inconvenience was great – but did not overshadow our relief to see how much attention was being paid to security at each American airport. Nevertheless we rather wished that just once we had been waved through and someone else selected for the search process.

A chance encounter en route in Los Angeles with Alison Heather, Renée Fleming's personal assistant, who was also travelling between Sydney and her home in New York with her own toddler – apart from the unexpected pleasure at seeing a former acquaintance from Opera Australia (many years before) and the coincidence of her current employer who was soon to visit Brisbane and present a concert in association with Opera Queensland – the added bonus of a watchful presence while baggage was collected and children controlled can not be overstated!

### **Houston Grand Opera, Houston**

Security is now quite tight at entry points to backstage areas and offices of opera houses. My entry into Houston Grand Opera's downtown premises, following an interminable bus ride from the airport which seemed to be in the next state, was facilitated by having first unexpectedly come across a former Opera Australia colleague at stage door, Steve Hingley, who was now part of HGO's directorial staff. Following this pleasant surprise I was further delighted to meet the Director of the Studio (as the Young Artist programme is called) Diane Zola, who welcomed me warmly. Herself a singer who has only recently switched careers to join the ranks of administrators and educators, it was clear that Diane's energy and enthusiasm thoroughly pervaded the training of her young charges. Later I met another acquaintance from my time at Opera Australia, Patrick Summers who is now Musical Director of Houston Grand Opera.

As luck would have it I was able to attend two very memorable occasions: the opening night of Tchaikovsky's *Yevgeniy Onegin* and one of the final stage and orchestra dress rehearsals, conducted brilliantly by Patrick Summers, for *Of Mice and Men* by the American Carlisle Floyd. The legendary composer (a co-founder of the Studio together with David Gockley, the current director of Houston Grand Opera) was present himself at the rehearsal and it was hard to know whether to be more moved and impressed by this fact or by the cast and their stunning performances of this extraordinarily beautiful and powerful score.

The Houston Grand Opera Studio Artists were, like those at Opera Australia, Covent Garden, the Metropolitan and many other major houses, constantly able to appreciate the skills of incredibly well-credentialed professionals rehearsing and performing with and before them. Here again valuable lessons are learnt by osmosis and when I attended the opening night of *Yevgeniy Onegin* it was impressive to observe the Studio's young mezzo-soprano Angela Niederloh holding her own in the part of Filipyevna in a cast led by the superbly polished Onegin of Bo Skhovus. Baritone Aaron Judisch as a very able Captain and bass Joshua Winograde as Zaretski completed the picture - the ideal performing opportunity for these three developing artists but certainly not one beyond their considerable talents. Together with the other Studio Fellows I observed they made an exciting group.

The training programme offered in Houston was fairly typical of that in most larger opera houses and schools I visited or with whom I made contact. It is worth quoting some of its curriculum and philosophy here as it sums up well the aims of most Young Artist programmes in producing well-rounded performers who can not only sing very well but who have been exposed to every possible element of stagecraft that they are likely to encounter in their careers.

#### *Artistic Philosophy*

*The mission of Houston Grand Opera Studio is to provide career development for young artists who have demonstrated potential to make major contributions to the opera/musical theater profession. The Studio's goal is to develop well-rounded professionals prepared for all performance aspects in the opera/music theater field and in all genres: traditional European operas, new and twentieth-century opera/musical theater works by American artists from diverse cultural backgrounds, innovative interpretations of the standard repertoire, American musical theater classics, recitals, concerts with orchestra, and fully-staged productions.*

*Houston Grand Opera's main-stage programming and annual Studio production provide members with the widest range of performance opportunities and styles. The Houston Grand Opera Studio provides the necessary time, training and experience to aid each member's artistic development from promising student to practicing professional.*

#### *The Training and Development Process*

*Each season Houston Grand Opera Studio provides eight to twelve young artists with the opportunity to study and perform under a highly respected professional staff of teachers and performers. Studio artists commit themselves to an intense individualized study program while in residence in Houston from September through May. Classes in voice, acting, stage movement, diction and languages are scheduled regularly. Extensive individual coachings are part of the daily work and career counselling sessions are provided throughout the year. Special classes focusing on topics such as fight choreography, audition techniques, taxes and personal finance, Alexander technique, performer's stress management, public relations, and agent representation are conducted by experts in their field. Adjunct instructors include master coaches and conductors.*

*The Studio requires its artists to commit to the standards and demands of the profession. Because the training process is progressive and each member's artistic development is unique, the Studio program allows artists to continue their training over a two to three year period with opportunities for advanced study abroad. The main-stage performance exposure enables Studio artists to be reviewed individually by local, national and international press.*

*Performing Experience*

*Based upon their level of ability, the artists are assigned supporting roles in HGO's main-stage productions. Additional performance experience includes principal roles in student matinees, study cover assignments of major roles and paid public engagements for community outreach. These assignments provide the opportunity to learn major roles, expand repertoire and demonstrate individual abilities. Other opportunities include Studio-produced recitals, concerts, and, since the 1993-94 season, full-scale productions.*

*The Studio recognizes performance experience with newer forms of music theater and in innovative stagings of standard repertoire as an essential training element in developing well-rounded professionals. Given HGO's commitment to commissioning and producing new works and the success of its Opera New World program, Studio artists are provided opportunities to create new roles and premiere new pieces.*

*Performing and Networking*

*Studio artists interact with professional singers, conductors, stage directors, designers and technicians of national and international acclaim and follow a standard rehearsal and production schedule for a major opera company. Houston Grand Opera arranges auditions for Studio artists throughout the year with artist management, visiting general directors of other opera companies, and guest conductors and stage directors.*

While in Houston, another coincidence made me realise what a small world this is. Churchill Fellow and Opera Queensland colleague Susan Dunn was also in Houston. Although we tried hard to meet up before I had to leave, alas I was eventually defeated by the difficulties of the transport system. However, it was extraordinary to find oneself in such an unknown and seemingly distant place only to encounter so many familiar faces.

### **Metropolitan Opera, New York**

It hardly needs to be stated that this programme, the Metropolitan Opera Lindemann Young Artist Program, which covers every possible need for the serious young professional singer, was the one most aspired to everywhere in the States, particularly by students of many of the other programmes I encountered. Gayletha Nichols, its Director, generously gave up time from her impossibly busy and complex schedule of administration to meet me and discuss my interest in the programme. Certainly a programme of this intensity and with such a high level of expectation of success would not suit any but the most ambitious and strong young performer who could turn its demands into advantages. While stories of young performers losing their voices and falling by the wayside occasionally reached me, for those who could make it through the 2-year programme the rewards were immeasurable.

Being in not just the same city but also the same company as the types of artists treading the stage at the Metropolitan Opera daily, coupled with the tuition provided by the likes of Joan Dornemann, Vocal Coach and Nico Castel, language coach, mean that these artists have a richness of experience and training available nowhere else except at Covent Garden's recently created Vilar Young Artist Programme.

The highlight of my time at the Metropolitan Opera was making the acquaintance of Susan Webb, whose expertise as a coach and prompter is well-known. Her thoughtful discussions of the study habits and training methods of many different courses belied the fact that she was in the thick of rehearsals for *War and Peace* which the Met was about to present. Resuming professional contact with her has been a very rewarding result of the Fellowship for me, as well as providing a generous personal insight into the complex processes that go into presenting opera and training young singers, répétiteurs (pianists working in opera) and prompters in the States as well as at related summer schools in other countries such as Italy today. Her knowledge of the artform and innate wisdom is an inspiration while at the same time bestowing an inevitable feeling of inadequacy.

## **Curtis Institute of Music, Philadelphia**

Here I was welcomed by Mikael Eliassen, whose reputation for energy and serious musicianship as a coach and pianist had already been the subject of conversation with others I had spoken to. An impressive and beautiful edifice greets the first-time visitor and provides a worthy background for the following philosophy as described by the Institute:

*How is Curtis unique?*

*The Curtis Institute of Music was founded in 1924 by Mary Louise Curtis Bok "to train exceptionally gifted young musicians for careers as performing artists on the highest professional level." From the start, the school curriculum has reflected Mrs. Bok's philosophy on the best way to accomplish the school's mission. Over the past 77 years, her ideas have been substantiated by the quality of artists to emerge from this esteemed school of music. Today, the student-to-teacher ratio is the same as it was three quarters of a century ago, providing for the unparalleled training of gifted young musicians by many of today's most respected artists and teachers.*

*Additional Curtis ideologies, which remain in place today include the following:*

*Curtis is the only major music conservatory in the United States that provides merit-based full-tuition scholarships to all of its students, who are chosen as a result of highly selective auditions.*

*The Institute's enrollment is purposely kept very limited, with just enough students to complete a full orchestra and a select opera department, plus a small number of keyboard, composition and conducting students. The enrollment for 2001/02 is 162, which is almost the same as it was when the current president/director, Gary Graffman, entered Curtis as a seven-year-old piano student in 1936.*

*The length of a student's stay is open-ended and can be anywhere from two to 10 or even 11 or 12 years. Students graduate when their teachers decide they are ready. In most cases this is between three and five years, though younger students often stay longer.*

*Another unconventional Curtis precept is that a greatly gifted youngster should study with an important teacher from the beginning of his/her conservatory days. There is no "preparatory" department and there are no teaching assistants. Even the youngest elementary-school-aged students receive training from the same teachers at the same intensive levels as do their older colleagues (the only difference being that the youngsters receive additional lessons).*

*The "older" students are generally younger than those at other conservatories: Most instrumentalists must be under 21 years of age to qualify for acceptance at Curtis.*

*The Institute's 85-member faculty is composed largely of performing musicians whose livelihood is not primarily derived from teaching. Students are thus accepted on merit alone and not in order to fulfill contractual obligations to teachers.*

*All piano, organ, harpsichord, conducting and composition students are lent Steinway grand pianos for use throughout their studies at Curtis. Mrs. Bok set this policy when she founded the school.*

From the above the Institute's philosophy may appear to be slightly more academic and less performance-oriented, especially where the vocal and opera students are concerned, but thanks to the availability of highly trained student orchestral musicians and the presence of Mikael Eliassen, a regular guest at Opera Companies and training programmes around the world, the singers were involved in presenting recital and concert programmes to a high standard on a regular basis.

### **Academy of Vocal Arts, Philadelphia**

In contrast to the Curtis Institute, Philadelphia's Academy of Vocal Arts provides a very different training philosophy and is entirely focussed on opera. Director K. James McDowell graciously met and gave me a tour of the stately old building near the city centre which the Academy is fortunate enough to call home. To quote once again:

*The full course of study at The Academy of Vocal Arts is four years. It should be emphasized that all training is directed towards preparation for a career in singing rather than toward the fulfillment of set academic requirements or a career as a teacher. As in a professional opera theatre, the actual ability and diligence of a singer is often given more weight than seniority when casting decisions are made. Further, the assignment and performance of specific roles must be considered within the context of AVA's overall instructional program, the foundation of which is the detailed study of operatic literature. Each role assigned to a singer is a significant portion of this learning process. However, no guarantee is made that a singer will necessarily perform a role which he/she has been assigned or has prepared.*

*At this time, no degrees are granted, but Artist Diplomas are awarded to those whom The Academy believes are ready for operatic and concert careers, and have completed the minimum required classes. The Academy of Vocal Arts is an accredited, non-degree-granting member of the National Association of Schools of Music. Course work completed at AVA does not compile credit-hours, and is not transferable to other institutions.*

Once again I enjoyed my visit and was conscious of a sense of energy and expectation. The group of students I was fortunate enough to observe rehearsing operatic scenes were certainly of a very high standard and the direction and musical direction provided equally so. An impressive faculty list and a season of operatic performances means that this school is yet another option for those wanting to advance their chances of appearing on major American and world stages.

### **Manhattan School of Music, New York**

After some delay in contacting the Opera Studio Manager, Gordon Ostrowski, his assistant Caren France eventually managed to get our timetables to coincide and on a very bleak day with snow threatening and a razor-sharp wind I wrapped myself up and set off for the subway to take me there. Fortunately after a misunderstanding which saw me left waiting in the foyer for a lengthy period as the promised announcement of my presence had not been made to Gordon I was taken to meet this very interesting and experienced stage director who introduced me to a class of bright students about to begin a session incorporating the use of period style and dramatic delivery into their own repertoire. This was quite a different method of making the students aware of the need to communicate while taking on an operatic role and was at times eye-opening not only to me but to each of them. The elements of period style they had been studying were also required to be included in the exercise and I was surprised to see how thoroughly and enthusiastically they had prepared their pieces. After a further meeting during which I was furnished with much relevant literature and information and shown other aspects of the Program's workings within the School, I reluctantly concluded my time here, certainly a highlight of the trip.

A comparison of the Manhattan School of Music's audition procedures and expectations with those discussed elsewhere should prove of interest and give further insight into the emphasis placed on certain skills:

#### *Audition Procedures*

*All voice applicants must submit a cassette or video-tape for pre-screening purposes. The tape must include all of the repertoire as listed below. It is not required that the tape be a professional or studio recording, but the sound quality must be as good as possible.*

*Live auditions are approximately 10 minutes in length (doctoral auditions are approx. 20 minutes in length). Applicants must perform all works from memory. Each applicant chooses their first work and the faculty will choose a second work from the audition repertoire list provided by the applicant. An accompanist is provided free of charge for all auditions. If applicants wish to rehearse with MSM's accompanist BEFORE their audition, rehearsal time and cost should be arranged between the two parties.*

#### *Undergraduate Audition Requirements*

- 1. A work in Italian from the 17th or 18th century*
- 2. An English work (not a translation)*
- 3. A work in French OR in German*

#### *Graduate Audition Requirements*

- 1. A work in English*
- 2. A work in German*
- 3. A work in French*
- 4. A work in Italian*
- 5. An opera aria*
- 6. An oratorio aria*

#### *Doctoral and Professional Studies Audition Requirements*

*A full-length recital from four contrasting style periods that includes compositions in English, French, German and Italian*

### **Hecht Studio, New York**

Although I hoped to be in touch with long-standing friends and colleagues Joshua Hecht and Donna Balson, I had not initially envisaged making their Studio part of my research. However, through them I was in fact fortunate enough to come into contact with a number of aspiring singers many of whom were not undergoing formal training programmes with opera companies or institutions but who, while dependant on supporting themselves in order to live, invested as much of their resources and energy as they could spare into their own development as artists. I found this to be a very different experience from those elsewhere, particularly as many of those students would if in Australia have been placed vocally, language and performance-wise well above most of the applicants or auditionees vying for positions in Young Artist Programmes or even engagements in operatic seasons. The unswerving commitment of such private students was not always rewarded by success given the incredibly fierce competition for the relatively small amount of work in American companies. This may sound surprising to those of us who have always understood that the States, if only one could manage to gain a working visa, is brimming with companies small and large all offering work. However, the standard of singing training is overall so high, and the population so large, that the number of very well-positioned young professionals ready for employment results in a very similar situation to the Australian experience - that there are too many trained singers and too little work.

The singers who are not blessed by the relative security that being part of a recognised post-graduate course or Young Artist programme bestows are, like all artists but perhaps far more so for the sake of being (in this case) New Yorkers, relentless in their pursuit of a career and their dreams. I saw many individual examples of entrepreneurial behaviour and was fortunate enough to take part in two resulting events.

The first was a cabaret-style performance featuring not contemporary music but rather opera and classical song in the basement venue of a restaurant in Greenwich Village. Apart from the two singers who had recommended me as the accompanist, I met the cast of the show at one rehearsal before the performance itself. An enterprising group create monthly and present a witty programme. This one featured a mock in-depth interview format based around a fictitious opera diva and it was very interesting to watch the Americans themselves sending up their own television personalities. Interspersed with the linking dialogue, none of which the performers displayed any reluctance or anxiety in delivering even though much of it appeared to be created as the rehearsal proceeded, were classical and operatic items sung by the "diva" and her former acquaintances. Apart from watching the easy manner with which all the performers took part, it was also interesting when it came to the evening performance in a smoky, crowded atmosphere-filled room to see how enthusiastically such a diverse group of patrons (the room was full with no room to move) received the musical content of the programme. There was no doubt that here opera was more than accepted and so the artists performing had the opportunity not only to hone their own skills but also to reinforce that idea in the community - a vital element directly relating to support for the art form and therefore the training of its next generations.

On the second occasion I took part as accompanist in a performance in a church and this time the programme consisted of large and uncompromising chunks of fairly serious opera - almost the whole third act of *Tosca*, Santuzza and Turiddu's darkly passionate and lengthy scene of confrontation from *Cavalleria rusticana*, a duet from *Siegfried*, Violetta's "Sempre libera" from the end of Act 1 of *La traviata* in its demanding entirety. There were no English translations but the audience, with members from every age group and musical background, bravoed and cheered at the conclusion of each and every piece. At the end of the concert they milled around to welcome and congratulate the conquering heroes - young singers who had forced themselves to extend their own development by placing challenging new repertoire under the spotlight. The warm praise meant that the few less successful moments were not remembered as a focus of failure but simply of improvements to be worked upon for next time, and a feeling of achievement and encouragement rewarded the singers' efforts and provided more of that all-important positive reinforcement and drive to continue.

### **Mannes College of Music, New York**

Another unscheduled addition to my programme of study came when I discovered a smaller but flourishing opera course within the Mannes College of Music. Most importantly, my visit there was in time to coincide with a public masterclass given by the operatic soprano and well-known “diva” Renata Scotto. It transpired that the Young Artists had enjoyed her presence in the course for a week prior, and in this masterclass she worked with a number of them in presenting arias and one duet concert-style. The cost was a mere US\$20, great value for members of the public wanting an opportunity to see and hear it was no surprise to find when I came to pick up the complimentary tickets that Emily Wieland had kindly organised on behalf of Director of Opera Joseph Colaneri that the large hall was fully booked.

Maestro Joseph Colaneri, who gave an elegant and warm speech at the event’s opening detailing the activities of the programme and Miss Scotto’s recent involvement with the singers, is well-placed in his other position as Associate Conductor at the Metropolitan Opera to provide contacts with important coaches from there and the New York City Opera as well as himself overseeing the singers’ development.

The Masterclass proceeded with much valuable insight, delivered with charm and humour by Miss Scotto. The singers appeared comfortable and receptive and the supportive pianist Susan Woodruff, herself a faculty member, was often called upon to affirm the suggestions and observations made. With much in-depth treatment of dramatic interpretation, phrasing and recitative, the concert and class lasted far longer than its originally scheduled finishing time. Needless to say nobody seemed upset by this although eventually the final item had to be cut short. The audience certainly got its money’s worth – apart from Renata Scotto’s presence there were a number of other stars on stage among the students performing.

With Opera Queensland about to undertake a newly created Masterclass Series featuring members of the Young Artist Program in Brisbane and other singers, this was a most interesting and timely experience.

Since that time it has also been announced that Regina Resnik and Renata Scotto have joined the Mannes faculty as Master Artists-in-Residence of the Mannes Opera program where they assist young singers in preparing their roles in the College’s operatic productions.

The Career Development strand offered at Mannes College features the following options worth noting. Many vocal courses in Australia and overseas while attempting to include some of this vital information could benefit from seeing how succinct and accessible it appears in this curriculum:

***Business Savvy for Musicians***

*1 hour weekly, 1 credit.*

*Survival and Business Skills for emerging classical musicians and those considering a career working with musicians. This series of seminars led by staff members of Concert Artists Guild, one of the world's most important career development service organizations, provides practical information on how to survive and succeed in an increasingly challenging field. Class sessions will be taught by various members of the Concert Artists Guild staff, and will include visits by guest lecturers active in the profession. Topics will include management and self-management, competitions, debuts, recordings, publicity materials, press, and public relations. Each student will design and implement a hands-on career development project.*

***Booking Your Own Concert Engagements***

*1 1/4 hours weekly, 12 weeks; 1 credit.*

*Most artists are not fortunate enough to have professional management. These artists (and even those who do have management) stand to benefit tremendously from a thorough knowledge of the process of booking a concert engagement. Information contained in this course will help young musicians in getting the work that will launch and sustain their careers, and developing these careers to a level at which they will be attractive to management agencies. Further, students will learn how concert presenters and agents operate, and how to work most effectively with them. Also included will be information relating to finding and communicating with concert presenters, drawing up contracts, and negotiating fees.*

***Marketing Your Music***

*1 hour weekly; 1 credit*

*Aimed at composers and performers alike, this course helps the young musician market and place his/her music for best exposure. It will consider compensation, including music licensing, and royalty payments; unions, guilds, and agents; marketing and distribution channels; copyright law and protection, including piracy, counterfeiting and home recording. Guest lectures will feature experts in specific areas of music sales and distribution.*

***Artist Development***

*1 hour weekly; 1 credit*

*This course offers a series of workshops in commercial artist development and promotion with a focus on the translation of creative concepts into a marketable product. Both individuals and ensembles will learn the mechanics of compiling and implementing self-promotional campaigns through the development of print materials, a course CD recording, and live performances. Topics include: selection and development of music/press kit materials, sales strategies, and networking opportunities. In addition, a general overview of local venue opportunities, management and booking agencies, unions and guilds, producer and record administrative roles, and management and recording contracts will be presented. (Interview with instructor required)*

### **More travel and Manchester**

Wherever we went in America it seemed, although this cannot be completely accurate, that while it is nearly impossible to get anywhere without a car it was equally impossible to find a means of car transport which can accommodate our expectation of child car restraints. The same might be said for feeding a baby which simply did not appear to be acceptable in public – but feeding and changing rest-rooms were very few and far between. This was one aspect of our time in the States which we were not sorry to leave behind. Leaving New York's JFK Airport behind for the final time we crossed the Atlantic on an overnight flight and arrived at Heathrow to begin the British leg of our trip in the morning of Tuesday 12 February. With bags repacked and some of them left behind in London, and ready to brave the cold again, we set off northwards city of Manchester and the Royal Northern College of Music, an institution I'd heard about often in Australia as a highly-regarded place to study, both from former students and from other professionals with an association there such as movement and drama coach and director Anna Sweeny, Joseph Ward OBE who heads the Opera Division at the Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University, and coach and accompanist John Woods, also of the Vocal Department there who kindly provided an introduction to the Head of Opera and Vocal Studies, Alexander Crowe.

## **Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester**

To give an idea of the size and credibility of this department, despite its being located a considerable distance from the amenities and operatic events of London, it is worth viewing the enviable list of current staff associated just with the opera and vocal school.

### **Head of School**

Alexander Crowe, MA(Cantab), LRAM

### **Director of Opera Studies**

Stefan Janski, LRAM, LUD, Dip.NCSD, FRNCM

### **Director of Vocal Studies**

Caroline Crawshaw, ARMCM, FRNCM

### **Tutors in Vocal Studies**

Robert Alderson, ARCM, LGSM, Dip.Ed(Manchester)

Mary Brennan, GRNCM, ARNCM

Caroline Crawshaw, ARMCM, FRNCM

Sandra Dugdale, AGSM

Colin Iveson, GLOC

Jeffrey Lawton

Patrick McGuigan, ARMCM, FRNCM

Barbara Robotham, ARMCM, FRMCM, FRNCM

Anthony Roden

Susan Roper, BA(Auckland), Magister Linguae (Florence), PGDipRNCM

Honor Sheppard, ARMCM, FRMCM

Peter Alexander Wilson, Dip.RSAMD

### **Tutor in English Song**

Caroline Crawshaw, ARMCM, FRNCM

Tutor in French Song

Henry Herford, MA (Cantab), ARNCM, GRNCM

### **Tutor in Italian Song**

Susan Roper, BA(Auckland), Magister Linguae (Florence), PGDipRNCM

### **Tutor in Lieder Studies**

Thomas Schulze

### **Tutor in Period Performance**

Philippa Hyde, DipRAM

### **Tutor in Oratorio**

Russell Medley, GRNCM, ARNCM

### **Tutor in Pedagogy**

Barbara Robotham, ARMCM, FRMCM, FRNCM

### **Tutor in Diction**

Phyllida Furse, BA(Hons), PGCE, ALAM

### **Tutors in Opera and Dramatic Interpretation**

Jennifer Hamilton, GRNCM, LTCL

Stefan Janski, LRAM, LUD, Dip.NCSD, FRNCM

### **Tutors in Communication in Performance**

Jennifer Hamilton, GRNCM, LTCL

### **Tutor in Recitative**

Alexander Crowe, MA(Cantab), LRAM

**Tutors/Repetiteurs, Opera Music Staff**

Robin Humphreys, BMus(Birmingham), PPRNCM

Russell Medley, GRNCM, ARNCM

Christopher Squires, Dip.RCM(Perf), LTCL

David Sutton, LLCM

Kevin Thraves, DipRCM, ARCM

**Tutor in Movement and Dance**

Bethan Rhys Wiliam, ARAD, AISTD, Cert.Ed., TDLB D32 & 33

**Tutors in Language Studies**

Claudia Law, Dip.ESA(Hamburg), MA(Manchester) - Co-ordinator of Language Studies, Tutor in German

Clarisse Bonnin - Tutor in French

Gabriella Bullock, Dottoressa in Lettere Classiche (Bologna) - Tutor in Italian

Jarmila Hickman, BA, MA(Manchester) - Tutor in Russian and Czech

Antonio Tilli, Dottore in Lettere Moderne(Chieti) - Tutor in Italian

**Visiting Tutors**

Paul Wynne Griffiths (Royal Opera House)

James Holmes (Opera North)

Ava June

Adèle Leigh

**Administrative Assistants**

Paula Redway, MA(Manchester) (Course Administrator)

Gail Waters, BA(OU) (School Administrator)

With Opera North also resident in Manchester there are many fine British-based performers and teachers available and the College produces a continuous flow of young singers who move into other London-based programmes including, as had just happened to one student while I was there, the Vilar Young Artist Programme.

Apart from discussions with Alec Crowe regarding the nature of the course and its activities I was able to view a stage rehearsal for the forthcoming student production of Tschaikovsky's *Pikova Dama* (*Queen of Spades*). Mark Shanahan had just taken over following the previous conductor's sudden withdrawal close to opening. Although seemingly a challenging work for a student organisation to tackle, it was a credit to the standard of the young singers coupled with the direction of Stefan Janski, excellence of the staff and the musical leadership of Mark Shanahan and Alec Crowe that the cast was were not only vocally but dramatically capable of successfully attempting this piece, and in the original Russian.

At this juncture it would be appropriate to discuss the weight placed on language studies at this institution, as evidenced by the number of regular and guest staff tutors listed. The tuition offered is described thus:

*Language tuition:*

*All undergraduate and postgraduate vocal students are offered language classes. For those students whose first language is not English, coaching in English as a foreign language is available.*

*Coaching on correct pronunciation and meaning of arias and songs is available on a one-to-one basis for all vocal students.*

*All the language tutors at the RNCM are native speakers. They teach the language to the highest possible standard in relation to a musical environment and career, but also try to impart a knowledge and history of the culture of the respective country. Particular emphasis is placed on achieving impeccable pronunciation in all languages.*

*Undergraduate singers take two years each of Italian (years 1 and 2), German (years 2 and 3), and French (years 3 and 4). The study of Russian and Czech is optional and is open to undergraduates with good linguistic abilities in year 4. At the end of year, students are assessed via a written paper and oral examination in each language.*

*A variety of courses is offered to vocal students to accommodate different levels and standards.*

*Postgraduate singers may choose which languages they wish to study during their course. The study of Italian and German is recommended but classes in French, Russian, and Czech are also available. For those students whose first language is not English, there are classes in English as a foreign language. Students may take Cambridge examinations in this subject if they wish.*

*A variety of courses is offered to vocal students to accommodate different levels and standards.*

*Language Courses*

*Vocal students come to the RNCM with varying knowledge of foreign languages. Some have already learned a language to an intermediate or advanced level (GCSE or Advanced Level standard); some have little or no knowledge of foreign languages. For this reason, the RNCM caters for all levels:*

*Beginners - those who have little or no knowledge of the language;*

*Continuation - those who have studied the language in the past, but have forgotten most of it;*

*Intermediate - students with GCSE or equivalent;*

*Advanced - students with A level or equivalent.*

The commitment of funds and curriculum time to the thorough study (both class and individual) of language within this course provides a solid message to the student as to its importance to the professional singer.

### **Royal Opera House, London**

I first met Tisi Dutton, recently appointed Director of the Vilar Young Artist Programme, briefly when she visited Brisbane in 2000 on an audition trip in her role as Director of the Britten-Pears School. Australian-born, Tisi's direct and confident management of the new programme in London obviously agreed with her and she too gave up time within her busy days to meet with me and discuss thoughts and methods related to training.

Like the New York Metropolitan's Lindemann Young Artist Program, this one, prestigious, high-profile and generously sponsored, boasted a selection of salaried artists given training and performance opportunities while simultaneously being in daily contact with the likes of Sir Thomas Allen, one of the artists involved with their development.

The high standard expected of its applicants is summed up in the Vilar Young Artist Programme's information for prospective auditionees:

*Vilar 'Young' Artist is in a way a misnomer. They may be at the start of their careers, but they are not fresh out of school, nor are they inexperienced. All have worked with professional companies and have completed a college degree. They could easily make their way in a career outside of the Programme, but have come to the Royal Opera House in order to refine their skills as singers over a period of up to two years.*

Considering that the Young Artists in question are at times called upon to perform before royalty and to understudy and perform roles within the Royal Opera's main season at Covent Garden, it is not surprising that a high standard is expected.

Within the programme there is also a place for one stage director, one repetiteur and one conductor. These contracts are initially for one year, with the option of extension to two. For the repetiteur position, the audition requirements are extremely daunting and reflect the tough environment with which even the trainee repetiteur needs to cope.

For this prestigious programme and the opportunities it offers, it may come as no surprise that even auditions and interviews are by invitation only, even though this is an unusual circumstance.

There is no upper or lower age limit for the programme, but it is specifically intended to benefit extremely gifted individuals at the start of their professional careers. The voice type will often dictate this to a certain extent.

Singers, conductors or répétiteurs who apply are expected to have some performance experience and to have completed training at an established music college (although this is not an essential requirement). Similarly, applicants who are directors are expected to have some experience in mounting productions, either as a director or an assistant director.

Here, quoting again, is the overview provided of the programme.

*The Vilar Young Artists are salaried company members and work at the opera house on a full-time basis. They receive daily coaching in all opera disciplines, including musical style and interpretation, languages, movement, acting and stage technique, as well as guidance in related issues and career development. The Programme also funds private voice lessons with approved teachers. The work of the Programme is tailored to meet the individual needs and development rates of the artists. To ensure that the Vilar Young Artists gain the full benefit of the Programme's training, outside engagements may only be taken with the approval of The Royal Opera.*

*Each artist studies major roles with the Programme's Director of Musical Preparation, David Gowland, and with the music staff of The Royal Opera. Vilar Young Artists sing small roles in productions on the Royal Opera House's main stage and cover larger roles. They also have the opportunity to observe every phase of the rehearsal and production of operas for the main stage. Every facility of the company is made available to them so that their talents can be nurtured through total immersion in the life of the Royal Opera House.*

*Workshops and individual coaching with leading international artists are organised for the Vilar Young Artists. People who have worked with them since the start of the Programme in September 2001 include Sir Thomas Allen, Marcelo Alvarez, Kim Begley, Elizabeth Connell, John Copley, John Cox, Sir Edward Downes, Dale Duesing, Martin Duncan, Gerald Finley, Olivia Fuchs, Lisa Gasteen, Eric Halfvarson, Martin Handley, Martin Isepp, Anthony Rolfe Johnson, Yvonne Minton, Nelly Miricioiu, Diana Montague, Antonio Pappano, Luciano Pavarotti, Eva Randová, Carlo Rizzi, Amanda Roocroft, Craig Rutenberg, Kurt Streit, Tim Supple, Sam Taylor-Wood, John Tomlinson, Carol Vaness, Roger Vignoles, Simone Young and Francesca Zambello.*

*Concert work is also an important part of their training and regular performance opportunities for the Vilar Young Artists include lunchtime recitals in the Linbury Studio Theatre and appearances with The Soloists of the Royal Opera House in the Vilar Floral Hall. They also participate in the Royal Opera House's education work in schools and within the Royal Opera House.*

*It is planned the Vilar Young Artists will present opera productions, fully-staged and with orchestra, in the Royal Opera House's Linbury Studio Theatre. In addition, the Vilar Young Artists will give a performance each year with the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House on the main stage of the Royal Opera House. The first of these, on 14 July 2002, was also the first time all the five Vilar Young Artists appeared together on the main stage.*

*Currently at the beginning of its second season, the Programme includes ten singers, a conductor and a répétiteur.*

*The presence of the Vilar Young Artists in the Royal Opera House provides a new resource for developing and expanding the resident Company of opera principals and staff.*

Although clearly not suited to every emerging opera singer, the competition for places in this newly created programme is testament to its attraction.

### **English National Opera, London**

Although I did not originally include a specific period with the English National Opera in my proposal, it was nevertheless valuable to meet with Nicholas Selman, whom I knew well from working together at various times at Opera Australia, and discuss aspects of singer training in this house as well as details of the current season. The English National Opera's Studio has quite a different slant which still provides valuable training and performing experience for its participants: in addition to commissioning new opera, the ENO Studio has been involved in international collaborations, provided unique training and workshop opportunities, and presented innovative events related to mainstage ENO operas.

### **Farewells**

Towards the end the days began to fly by impossibly fast. Before I knew it it was time to say goodbye to Keith and Stephanie, who had to get back home before her second birthday or suddenly add become not an infant on the plane a full-fare paying adult (not quite, but almost!) She made it with some hours to spare, the birthday was duly celebrated with the help of grandparents but without Mum and brother who had to content themselves with a postponed version a week later. With a little help from friends I was still able to carry out most of what I still wanted to do – the only exception being that I had to forgo a ticket offered to the dress rehearsal of *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* and *Erwartung*, the Royal Opera's much-anticipated double bill. A pity, but looking back now on the written form of what I had learnt and experienced it doesn't seem so much at all – especially as there is so much else I have no time or space to write about. When at last Nicholas and I made it to Heathrow and climbed onto the aircraft ourselves it was certainly with exhaustion but also more importantly a great sense of satisfaction at what had been achieved and the knowledge that the other half of the story would be ongoing for as long as I wanted it to be.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that there is in every country and culture where opera is presented a need to effectively bridge the gap between college/conservatory education, and a full-time career on the professional stage.

Moreover, in Australia such a career rarely now sees the singer contracted from one 12-month period to the next in the same house and so even experienced singers whose careers have evolved in the last decade or more are compelled to travel interstate to find employment opportunities. Many find that they need to supplement their contracts with teaching privately or in tertiary institutions private schools, which brings its own problems with the need for a regular base and schedule.

Entry standards appear to be similar on paper in almost every institution but in reality there is a natural filtering process which means that more prestigious (and often better-funded) programmes are keenly sought after by applicants.

Many of the American programmes showed a greater likelihood of approving outside singing engagements than did their British counterparts. Possibly this might be interpreted as caution on the British directors' parts to protect the young instrument, while the young American voices were often tackling much more strenuous repertoire with confidence from the beginning and therefore were seen as able to handle the challenges of a demanding role outside the programme, which would then prepare and support them. Often this was a chance to learn and present a role which would extend the artist slightly beyond their field of experience, such as a major principal role in a heavier work, in a house with a kinder acoustic and supportive company. Needless to say each argument was a persuasive one and reinforced the idea that each case is best taken on its own merits rather than creating a blanket rule.

Initially it had been my thought that it would be interesting to compare the activities of smaller companies' programmes with renowned ones in major organisations. However, I found that there was often little difference in the training itself and the staff and performance opportunities were what made the programme worthwhile. The energy and creativity of such directors as Mikael Eliassen (Curtis Institute, Philadelphia), K. James Rowell (Academy of Vocal Arts, Philadelphia), Gordon Ostrowski (Manhattan School of Music), Joseph Colaneri (Mannes College of Music) and Diane Zola (Houston Grand Opera Studio) meant that even for those not accepted into the Metropolitan Opera's coveted Lindemann programme there would be other options for being trained to a very high standard. In each programme it was possible to discern a slight bias toward certain aspects of stagecraft or performance with the result that an enviable choice of training courses was available to suit the individual. It must still be remembered that competition for each place is not only fierce but that the standard of applicant and their commitment to learning everything that will advance their career prospects is extremely high in every regard, particularly in the States.

Performance is considered one of the most valuable learning experiences. Contact with highly rated professionals whether by observation or in tutorial situations is likewise prized. Language is a perennial problem with students keen to undergo immersion courses in other countries but far less motivated to apply themselves to the fullest while other priorities such as voice lessons and performance are absorbing most of their attention. Other stagecraft and musicianship tuition is regarded anywhere from at best a bonus down to being tiresome, but my observation would be that this occurs more often where the young singer is overcommitted on a regular basis.

The most common variation in programmes involved the length of the programme - anywhere from a summer school of 12 weeks to 3 years as in the Metropolitan and Houston Grand Opera courses, or "open-ended" as in Curtis' example!

Sponsorship is one of the key elements to all American operatic training programmes and Houston was certainly no exception. The opportunity afforded the singers which would surely most surprise and impress Australian students is that of travelling overseas in the summer break for intensive language study, whether to Russia, Italy, France or Germany. Although not every singer is given this advantage - the needs of each individual determine the decision to send him or her to undertake a language course - but the message relayed both to the recipient and to those not so fortunate is a clear one of emphasis on the importance of proficiency in language.

It is hard to imagine such an icon as the Curtis Institute needing to plead for its continued existence. Nevertheless, the prestige of being a financial supporter for an institution able to proclaim such history and credentials is probably very attractive and there is surely no doubt that it will continue to be able to fulfil its mission statement.

In Houston, to give an idea of the levels of patronage needed or expected, one of the events connected with fund-raising for the training of Studio artists, the *Houston Grand Opera Annual Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers Concert of Arias*, carries a single ticket price of US\$250 but also unflinchingly suggests Benefactor Levels from US\$500 - \$50,000.

With the exception of the Royal Opera's Vilar Young Artist Programme in London, whose creation and existence is due to Alberto Vilar's generosity and interest, the most notable emphasis on sponsorship and patronage was to be seen in the American programmes. A good example is the Houston Grand Opera Studio where not only does each Young Artist have his or her own individually sponsored Fellowship but so too do the Director and Music Director. This is one area where Australian companies battle bravely but it tends to be the support of the passionate few which sustains any training that does exist. Although identifying and nurturing potential supporters is generally the domain of a specialised Development Manager there is much to be learnt in this area and the singers themselves must be encouraged to take an active part in this process.

With regard to recordings, there is increasingly a need for artists to include audio material in advance or instead of live auditions and so many casting and scholarship opportunities hang on this that techniques for dealing with the process itself must be learnt even at the beginning. No longer are these issues the province of only the regular recording artist. This was one aspect of the singer's craft I found little dealt with in almost every place I visited, which surprised me. In addition, it was interesting to find that the use of recording as a personal learning tool, especially given the superior quality of affordable equipment now available, was championed by some institutions and studios but strenuously avoided in others.

Finally, and on a non-musical subject, I learnt that the very best piece of equipment you can take overseas with a baby is a small, light carrying pouch. Not only recommended but for anyone both fortunate and foolhardy enough to venture into baby-unfriendly places like the cities I visited, there is no question – it was absolutely essential!

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is not simply enough for Young Artist programmes to train singers and other performers to produce technically perfect work. No amount of study can prepare a singer for or replace the lessons learnt during performance itself. Different types of performance create different levels of stress. It is vitally important to provide the chance to perform in every possible situation, from workshops and classes among peers to public performances in opera and concert to recordings which bring their own set of difficulties that must be overcome before a career can progress.

Having said this it is also imperative to encourage the artist to create their own performing opportunities. There is much to be gained from experiencing the process right from its inception through to the encores at the end of the concert. While this may have little effect on the vocal element itself the personal responsibility of communication and interaction with the audience will often produce a new level of understanding of the standards required.

The Career Development Course at Mannes School of Music, New York, provide a good example of how this advice can be structured to cover every possible aspect more effectively.

Gordon Ostrowski's historical style and repertoire class at Manhattan School of Music was a particularly enjoyable and different session with ideas I am interested in introducing in a more structured way to the stagecraft component of Opera Queensland's Young Artist Program.

An interesting element of the Houston Grand Opera Studio curriculum was the emphasis placed on music theatre in addition to opera. To this end a spoken monologue was required at audition and practice in this skill is another feature well worth considering for inclusion where practical in Young Artist training courses as it necessitates the practice of skills which may otherwise be avoided.

The information gathered from attendance at the Renata Scotta Masterclass at Mannes College of Music was immediately extremely beneficial in the planning of the Opera Queensland 2002 Masterclass Series, involving members of the 2002 Young Artist Program. Although there are masterclasses held from time to time in Australia they are often more like an in-house workshop style event and it was fascinating to be able to observe one of the truly public variety led by a very famous operatic performer.

## **POSTSCRIPT**

During the writing of this Report I was delighted to learn that Opera Queensland 2002 Young Artist soprano, Sally McHugh, had just been awarded a Churchill Fellowship and would shortly travel overseas to study with Joshua Hecht, with whom she had made contact through the Young Artist Program, as well as travelling to Europe before commencing as a 2003 Opera Australia Young Artist – an achievement of which to be very proud.

