



TOSC NOTES

THE NEWSLETTER OF TOSC ARTISTS PASSIONATE TO BRING FINE MUSIC TO YOU.

THE LATEST FROM TOSC NOTES
JUNE 25, 2025

Details of our next project are later
in our Notes ~ so check out our
Save the Date notice.

- 'Endless Pleasure'
- Raising funds for Ukraine
- Rusalka in Chamber - The Making of A Chamber Opera
- Save the Date - November 9

Endless Pleasure - May 17 2025



TOSC Update: A Year in Review

After an exceptionally busy year for TOSC in 2024, we've realised that we have yet to share a report on our major project that came to life last November —'Rusalka in Chamber'. Following a report about our recent concert featuring stunning English masterpieces, Jill Sullivan provides an in-depth article detailing the journey of *Rusalka*, from its initial planning stages to the final performance.

Our next thrilling concert is scheduled for November 9 at the Mosman Art Gallery, so be sure to check out our "Save the Date" announcement.

Read on for a wealth of exciting news about TOSC!

www.toscartists.com

Endless Pleasure

We had an absolute blast bringing “Endless Pleasure” to life and were gratified to see so many of you there enjoying the show. It was a true pleasure to work alongside Stephen Walter, and we are grateful for his consistent competence and support during both the rehearsal phase and the performance.



We felt both honoured and humbled to present this concert of English language from Britain and Australia and to raise funds to support the brave yet weary Ukrainian soldiers.

In our one departure from the English theme, each of us was profoundly touched by the power and beauty of the heartfelt Ukrainian folk song, ‘The Cuckoo Song’, beautifully performed by our Ukrainian-Australian soprano, Alya Meyer.

In total, we raised \$1,250, which has been sent directly to soldiers in Kharkiv who are in urgent need of essentials that many of us often take for granted, such as protective military clothing.



Highlights from a Memorable Concert

There's something uniquely magical about live concerts that blend history, emotion, and entertainment. Our recent concert was a tapestry of such unforgettable moments, with performances that left the audience spellbound. Here's a look at some of the standout highlights from the evening.

A Baroque Beginning and Ending to the First Half

The concert opened with an invitation to revel in the beauty of baroque music through Henry Purcell's enchanting 'Come Ye Sons of Art'. These semi-staged works set a celebratory tone, immediately drawing the audience into a world of rich, historical soundscapes.

Comedy and Drama in Harmony - The first half concluded in beautiful harmony and a torrent of joyous coloratura in works by Handel from his operas and oratorios.

Maria Hemphill's playful rendition of 'When First Amintas Sued for a Kiss' had the audience chuckling, while the lively lovers' quarrel in 'Traitors to Love' in the saw Matt Gaskin masterfully adding humour to the performance.



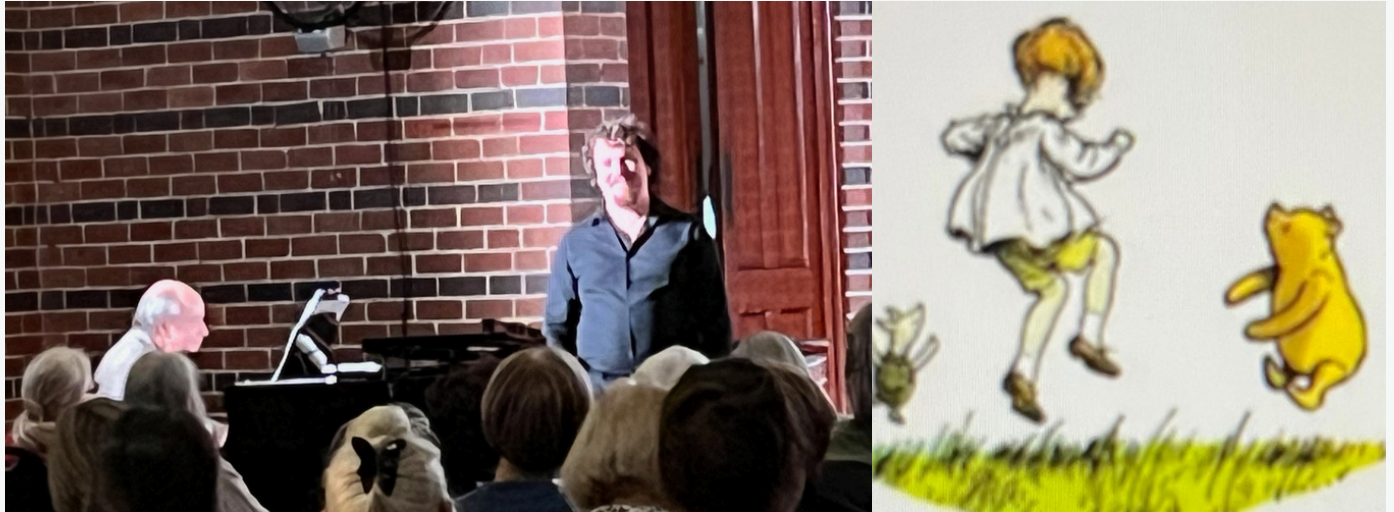
Contrasting these lighter moments was the poignant rendition of Dido's aria, 'Ah! Belinda, I am press'd with, torment' hauntingly delivered by Kerry Nicholson and the exquisite trio from Timon of Athens, 'But Ah! The delights of love' hauntingly sung by Lisa Munckton, Matt Gaskin and Brendan Nicholson.

These pieces showcased the versatile talent within the TOSC ensemble, each performer bringing their unique flair and emotion to the stage.



A composer performer

The entire TOSC family, along with the audience, was particularly delighted by Tristan Entwistle's brilliant rendition of his own entertaining song cycle titled 'Now We Are Six,' which features texts by A. A. Milne. We eagerly anticipate hearing more from this talented young composer-performer.



And female composers

The concert featured beautifully artistic performances of captivating works by female composers. 'The Seal Man' by Rebecca Clarke, was performed by Lisa Munckton and 'Sun Moon and Stars' by Elisabeth Maconchy, by Emma Häll.

Celebrating English Classics

No concert celebrating English vocal music would be complete without nods to composers like Boughton, Britten, Elgar, and Quilter.

Matt Gaskin captivated with 'Faery Song' from Boughton's wonderful twentieth century opera, the 'Immortal Hour.'

Jillian Halleron's performance of the 'Embroidery Aria' was a delicately nuanced masterpiece. 'Let the Florid Music Praise' from Britten's song cycle 'On this Island' was sung by Emily Turner with flourish and streams of golden sound laced with carefully drawn emotion in the contrasting second half of the song.

Jill Sullivan mesmerised with her rich warmth in 'Where Corals Lie', and the duet 'Weep You No More, Sad Fountains' by Emma Häll and Jillian Halleron was a standout moment, their voices blending in a harmonious and emotional crescendo.



Comic Greats

Additionally, no celebration would be complete without a contribution from Noël Coward and the quintessentially English duo of Gilbert & Sullivan. Matt Gaskin had the audience in stitches with his performance of 'Don't Put Your Daughter on the Stage, Mrs. Worthington' and laughter continued with the lively numbers from the 'Three Little Maids' and the men's trio from *Iolanthe*.

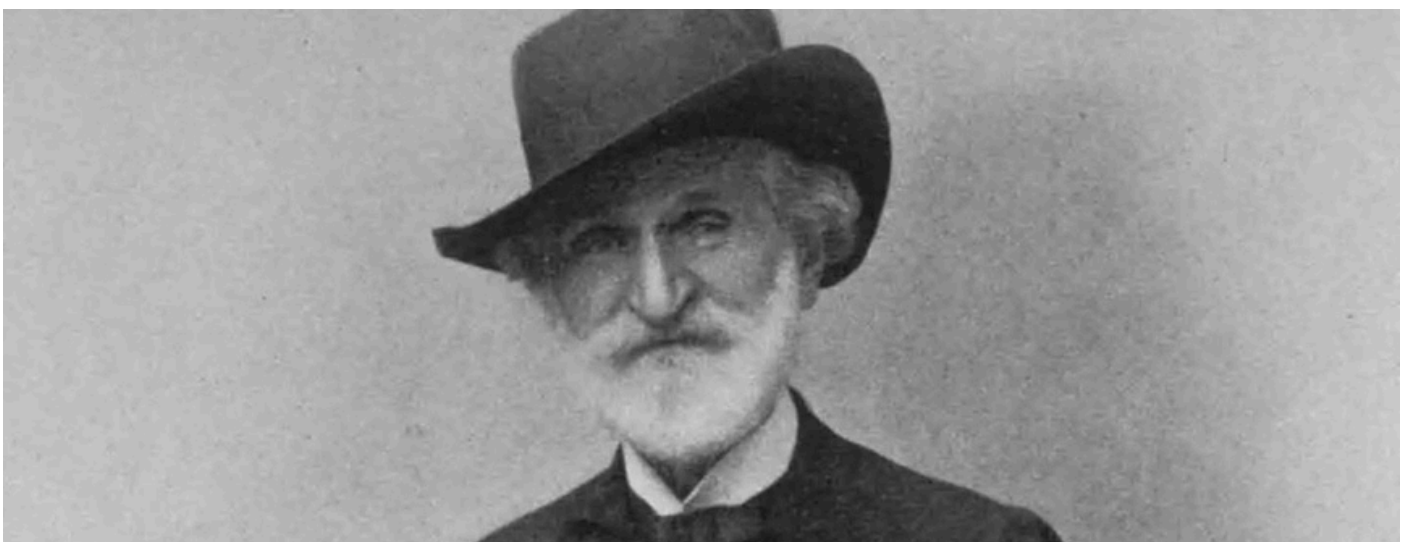


The concert concluded on a high note with a joyous tribute to music by West Australian composer Emeritus Professor David Tunley AM (dec) and Sir Arthur Sullivan's choral gem, 'The Long Day Closes.'



Overall, the concert was a brilliant showcase of talent and creativity, offering both humour and emotional depth.

We look forward to your company again at Mosman Art Gallery, Sunday 3pm, 9 November when we present Visions of Verdi - music from later operas.





Saturday May 17
4.30 pm - 6pm

Mosman Art Gallery
1 Art Gallery Way
Mosman



Endless Pleasure



TOSC Artists

Singers Passionate To Bring Fine Music To You

Glorious vocal gems
from English opera & song



www.toscartists.com

Rusalka - the making of a Czech fairy tale opera in chamber

Background

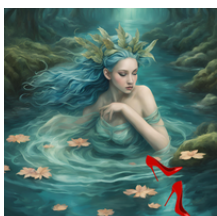
TOSC emerged from the loss of singing opportunities in Sydney for singers during the pandemic. Specifically, in the second long lock down a project was conceived to give singers something to work for and keep up motivation.

A long held passion of Jill's, the Dvorak's opera Rusalka, was chosen alongside Jake Heggie's Dead Man Walking plus another Czech opera, Janáček's Cunning Little Vixen to include in an educational project.

To facilitate this project, we needed musical and language input at the highest level. Deborah Humble kindly introduced us to Sharolyn Kimmorley AM who recorded tapes of the music for the singers to work with.

Jill's close friend and musical collaborator, Czech born and Prague Conservatory trained pianist, Šárka Budínská who is now based on the Gold Coast, provided language tapes. Šárka also gave us individual and group teaching sessions online.

The pandemic project culminated in a live performance shortly after we returned to 'normality'. Only a few highlights of the opera Rusalka were in this first concert, but the intention was always to extend this. And so with 2024 being the International Year of Czech Music, there was no better time! Accordingly planning began in earnest in 2023.



The purpose

1. Role Preparation

To give working singers the opportunity to prepare roles from Rusalka in the Czech language with professional language and musical coaching, then to embed theses through performances of the opera.

2. Performance standards

To present this work to the highest possible musical standard in a chamber setting with piano.

3. Audience engagement

To bring this music to audiences unfamiliar with this repertoire in a playful way retaining the fairy-tale elements of the original composition.

We needed

Funding - unfortunately we were unsuccessful in obtaining grants and outside sponsorship, so Jill's determination to see this project to fruition, meant that she underwrote the venture. The hope was that there would be some return from Box Office.

Musical Direction - We were thrilled that **Sharolyn Kimmorley AM** again agreed to come on board as Musical Director and we are indebted to Sharolyn for her time, generosity in guiding and completely positive supportive input in all ways.

On Sharolyn's recommendation and after hearing him play for wonderful young coloratura soprano, Anna Tafani (who sang with TOSC in 2024 but has now retuned to Albania), **Martin Lijauco** was engaged to play for the project. **Stephen Walter** agreed to coach individual singers. And also stepped in for Martin when he was indisposed with influenza.



Sharolyn Kimmorley AM



Working together in rehearsal



Martin Lijauco in performance photo credit - Marc Lestavel

Language Coaching

Preparations commenced in January 2024 on for one of the most challenging aspects of this project, conquering the sung Czech language. Šárka began creating the tapes we needed for all to learn almost the entire opera and was commissioned to provide further online sessions.

Dramatic Work

Given that we were presenting in a chamber type, our audiences would see us, our facial expressions in detail, we needed a very different style of acting and direction from what is required in the big houses of traditional opera theatres.

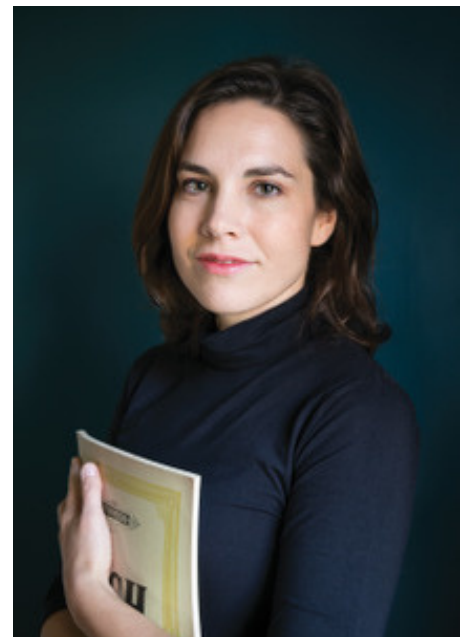
Director and Actor, Rob Horton and teacher - actor partner Susan Cary were also long term friends of Jill's. They had significant prior experience running their own touring theatre company working with teams across the UK and Europe and skilled in teaching Meisner technique, that suited our requirements.



Susan Cary



Rob Horton



Šárka Budínská

IT TAKES A VILLAGE! HERE WE ALL ARE! TEAM RUSALKA



Cast List

Rusalka	Jillian Halleron	Nov 20, 22 & 24
	Kerry Nicholson	Nov 28
Prince	Hongxin Jiang	
Vodnik	Michael Lampard	
Foreign Princess	Leah Thomas	Nov 20, 22 & 24
	Bronwyn Douglass	Nov 28 Nov 20
Ježibaba	Jill Sullivan	& 24 Nov 22 &
	Lisa Munckton	28 Nov 20 & 24
1st Sprite & Dance Captain	Alya Meyer	Nov 22 & 28
1st Sprite	Emily Turner	Nov 20 & 24
2nd Sprite	Dana Kingsford	Nov 22 & 28
	Emma Häll	Nov 20 & 24
3rd Sprite	Yolanda Lorenzato	Nov 22 & 28
	Angelique Tot	
Gamekeeper	Matt Gaskin	
Kutchnik	Maria Hemphill	
Bass Voice & Lighting assistant	Brendan Nicholson	
Lighting Design	Alex Stoner	
Surtitles	Jill Sullivan/Bec Moret, Peter Alexander, Yolanda Lorenzato	
Design & construction of Rusalka & Sprites	Sandra Oldis	
Costumes		
Overall Design	Jill Sullivan, Sandra Oldis & Rob Horton	
Music Director	Sharolyn Kimmorley AM	
Piano	Martin Lijauco	
Repetiteur	Stephen Walter	
Czech Language Coach	Šarka Budínská	
Assistant Director	Susan Cary	
Director	Rob Horton	
Producer	Jill Sullivan	

Making it Work - The Workshop

Getting everyone together as early as possible was a priority. Always, illness, other commitments, unexpected events crop up during a rehearsal period therefore the earlier things are prepared, the safer all round.

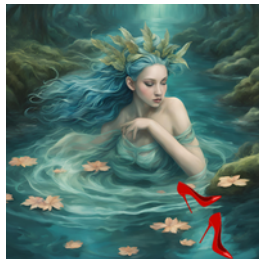
With our language coach and directing team Queensland based, we opted to bring both teams down from Queensland on the same weekend and hold a workshop in September 2024. This began with introductions to Czech language, a reading of the libretto on Friday evening then over Saturday and Sunday the singers worked on the language, acting skills and the music.

We had many laughs occasioned by theatrical explorations, (we will never forget Susan's hilarious portrayal of Vodník as a toad, Michael being unavoidably absent due to an Opera Australia tour). There were also a few challenges, including illness in our pianist, but covered a lot of work in the one weekend and successfully bonded as a team.



Synopsis

The Water Nymph falls in love with a charming Prince who visits her lake during his hunting trips. Yearning for his love, she turns to the witch, Ježibaba, to transform her into a human, exchanging her voice for a soul and body. The Water Sprite, Vodník, wary of humans, warns her against joining them. Ježibaba cautions Rusalka that the spell not only silences her but also threatens doom if she loses the Prince's affection—both she and the Prince will suffer. Rusalka accepts the risk, but her joy is short-lived. Though captivated by her beauty, the Prince soon tires of her silence and is drawn to a cunning Foreign Princess. Heartbroken, Rusalka returns to her lake, trapped between worlds as a 'Will-o'-the-Wisp'. To break the spell and rejoin her nymph sisters, she must kill the Prince, which she refuses to do. In a final act of love, the remorseful Prince embraces Rusalka, and with her kiss, he dies.



Our Approach

We let the story unfold naturally, avoiding didactic interpretations. While exploring themes of otherness, longing, and belonging, we encouraged our audience to draw their own conclusions, maintaining the fairy tale's light touch. On a deeper level, the story resonates universally, as fairy tales inherently explore truths that are “fundamental to life” and “universal in their application.”



Venue

The plan was for intimate performances in a chamber style, and wanted singers to have the chance to really embed their roles. This happens as singers are able prepare, perform and repeat a role through a season of performances, so we decided on a season of four performances.

The small venue of Boronia Park Uniting Church was chosen. This had a small stage area and decent grand piano, good general facilities with street parking and helpful staff. We used this for three weeknight performances but still needed to find another venue, available for a weekend performance. For this we chose The Goethe Institut Sydney, a known venue to many of our singers and audience.

Sets

We improvised a bit here. Stuff from home - screens to indicate the Witches Hut and covering the side entrance to the place. Various props were created, trees out of material cylinders and a picture of woodland and flags representing the Czech Republic. In a stroke of genius from our director, Rob, a single long piece of shiny blue satin cloth was used to represent the water that wrapped around Rusalka's legs, was waved by Wood Sprites and trailed by Vodník. A few pot plants and representative props completed our simple picture.



Lighting

The venue itself was a simple community style church with a stage and minimal backdrop so we believed it necessary to bring in lighting, which was fabulous but also turned out to be one of our largest single expenses at \$5000. Fortunately, baritone, Brendan Nicholson was able to operate the lights after a plot had been created and still able to perform in the Act 2 banquet scene in chorus.



About to clothe Rusalka in black shroud as she is condemned to become a Will' o the Wisp.

Costumes - This was coordinated with spectacular success by Sandra Oldis who created ethereal skirts for the Wood Sprites and beautiful dresses for the two sopranos who performed the title role, Jillian Halleron and Kerry Nicholson.

Other costumes were either from the artists' own wardrobes, borrowed or obtained from Temu, this including the bright green suit coat worn by Vodník.



Make up - Artists supplied their own and our Wood Sprites took great delight in finding wigs and glittery make up!

Surtitles - These were typed by Jill and formatted by Rebecca Moray and displayed above the stage.

We are thankful to Peter Alexander and Yolanda Lorenzato who ran these when Rebecca became indisposed.

Promotion and Marketing - This was very largely via mail outs, social media with radio interviews, calendar letter drops and word of mouth.



How did we do?

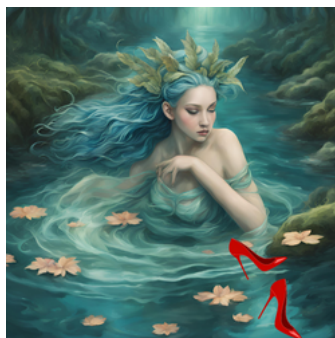
Well, of course I am biased, but I believe it was an immensely worthwhile venture. It was extremely gratifying to watch the development of the principal artists **Jillian Halleron** and **Hongxin Jiang** who both grew enormously as artists through the process.

It was also incredibly satisfying to see the 'covers', **Kerry Nicholson** (Rusalka), **Bronwyn Douglass** (Foreign Princess) actually perform and triumph with fine performances on the final night while **Angelique Tot**, (initially cover Third Wood Sprite) took on this role in what we dubbed 'The Purple Cast' performing on the second and the final night.

Sharolyn Kimmorley kept us together conducting subtly from a seated position and **Martin Lijauco** played brilliantly and on the final night conducted from the piano for the final show, when Sharolyn was in QLD working in the Lisa Gasteen Summer School Programme.

Jillian Halleron performed Rusalka in three of the four shows and excelled with her refined, warm and multi-layered Rusalka, while **Hongxin Jiang** was vocally and dramatically splendid in the demanding role of the Prince. **Jill Sullivan** and **Lisa Munckton** shared performances of Ježibaba, the Witch, bringing different nuances, vocal and dramatic, to the role, Jill as earthy half-Viking volva witch, and Lisa as femme fatal.

Our Foreign Princess, strode in resplendent in glittering gown and sang the house down- what else would one expect from **Leah Thomas**. Always a joy to work with, an artist who can literally get off a plane and step onto the stage, Leah brought a performing class all of her own and sang up a mighty storm in an unforgiving role.





As Kitchenhand (**Maria Hemphill**) and Gamekeeper (**Matt Gaskin**) played off each other superbly, characterising minutely and singing the Czech with apparent ease. With their impeccable timing, they formed the perfect comedy duo. One of the loveliest touches here was seeing the Kitchehand dust off the court servants!



And what was not to love about our Wood Sprites? We had two teams of these. Our 'Green' cast, a delightfully quixotic trio, of **Alya Meyer**, **Dana Kingsford** and **Yolanda Lorenzato** seemed to be true forest creatures, half human - half spirit, while our 'Purple' cast was a bolder trio of Sprites with attitude, a helluva lot of face-paint and vocal power, and I really wouldn't mess with them! **Emily Turner**, **Emma Häll** and **Angelique Tot**.



Then, the lynch pin of our show - Vodník! From the moment he took his place in yes, the front row of the audience, to his exit, dragging the blue shiny cloth water out through the auditorium, **Michael Lampard** brought dignity, panache, wit, a clear steady dark baritone clarity and vitality to the role of Vodník.



Covers as Performers

As this project was designed for singers to learn roles, it was important that as many singers as were capable and keen to manage this challenge were involved. To this end and to ensure rehearsals continued despite illness and singers' other commitments we had covers for major roles. These remarkable singers would sing when a cast member was absent. As the rehearsal period neared conclusion we all believed it reasonable to offer these singers a performance of their own. Initially this was slated to be a concert version, however with the gracious agreement of Jillian Halleron and Leah Thomas, both Kerry Nicholson as Rusalka and Bronwyn Douglass as Foreign Princess performed on the last night of the season with resounding success.



Finances

Box Office brought in approximately \$5000, while all up expenses were \$18,000. Nevertheless I am convinced that the project achieved its aims and personally, I am grateful to everyone who contributed to the artistic success of *Rusalka in Chamber*. I am also gratified that our audiences responded with great enthusiasm.

From our directing team

“Project *Rusalka*: The project was expertly produced by Jill Sullivan and ably facilitated by Sandra Oldis.

As the direction team we found the singers wonderfully ‘open’ to experimentation when it came to the introduction of the Meisner technique. What a joy!

The singers threw themselves into the process and it was great to ‘play’ with character and situation.

This made the direction of the piece relatively effortless.

All in all a wonderful project.”

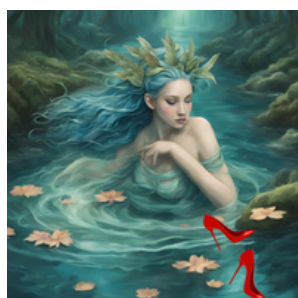
Rob Horton and Susan Cary

Conclusion

Rusalka in Chamber provided many singers and our audiences the opportunity to engage in a close up and personal experience of the famous Czech fairy-tale opera. Artists grew in stature through the process and many established new contacts in an industry demanding many good connections.

Overall there were many artistic triumphs in learning and performance.

At TOSC we are rightly proud of our achievements and inspired to take on challenges.



Leah Thomas – 20 Years at Opera Australia.

If you've ever visited the Opera Centre in Surry Hills, the home of Opera Australia, you may have noticed the photographs of former and current Company members adorning the walls of the 'Green Room' on the upper level. These artists represent all sectors of the company—including Principals, Chorus, Orchestra, Technical staff, and Administration—who have dedicated at least 20 years to their craft within the organisation.

I vividly recall the honour I felt being "hung" many years ago at the affectionately dubbed "20 Year Hanging," and we in the TOSC family are overjoyed that another member of our family has received this recognition at this year's event. So it is with pleasure that I write about Leah's achievements.



Celebrating 20 Years of Dedication

In 2004, Leah was pursuing her Diploma in Opera when Richard Gill "pulled her out" to join the OA School's Tour. This opportunity transitioned into a permanent casual position before she secured a full-time contract in the Chorus, which she continues to hold.

In today's world, spending 20 years in the same role with the same employer is a remarkable testament to commitment, a rarity in many fields. Leah's journey as an artist reflects her unwavering dedication to honing her craft. Her contributions to our concert, Visions of Verdi, will truly highlight what an exciting and talented performer Leah is.

To add a touch of nostalgia, Leah has graciously shared some photos from her first 20 years at OA, complete with her own captions, showcasing some fun memories along the way.

By Sandra Oldis



Eat your apples
girls!!!! (Figaro)



Ad for opera house, makup /
costume department.

Captions provided by the artist



Face like the back of
a bus????!!!!!!

Tosca ad 2014
(Gary Busby)



Actual scene from Don Carlo garden scene. With Anna Dowsley. (Busby)

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TOSC also congratulates Dr Natalia Melnik on the awarding of her doctorate. Natalia was our Russian coach and also performed in our all Russian concert last June, 'Songs from the Winter Palace'



Thesis topic : "Russian "Otherness" - Barriers and Solutions to Performing Russian Opera and Art Song for English-Speaking Classical Singers", and it is available here: <https://hdl.handle.net/2123/3>

Russian vocal music is an essential part of classical music's heritage. However, my research shows that English-speaking singers in the studied countries are still experiencing numerous strong interrelated barriers. They range from obvious ones, such as the unfamiliar sound of the language and different alphabet, to mental barriers and lack of confidence in the singers that they can cope with it and do justice to Russian poetry and music. In my study, I identified about 70 different barriers that singers and voice teachers face when approaching Russian repertoire. This number by itself shows us the scale of the problem.

In Australia, it is still very unusual for voice students to get familiar with the Russian repertoire from early stages of their learning, obtaining the important 'building blocks' that could make their future interaction with Russian vocal music easier. Sadly, the 'Russian Art Song' section was removed from the Sydney Eisteddfod syllabus a few years ago. At the same time, we are very lucky to have many enthusiastic singers who are open to exploring Russian vocal music later in their careers, and organisations that support them, such as TOSC and the Sydney Art Song Society. It was my great pleasure collaborating with TOSC last year, bringing an all-Russian concert program to the Sydney audience.

Dr Natalia Melnik



Lunchtime concert

*Rachmaninoff,
Tchaikovsky,
Rimsky-Korsakov,
Stravinsky,
Rubinstein*

**Singing: Natalia Melnik, Kerry Nicholson,
Suzi Stengel, Lisa Munckton, Louise Keast
Piano: Dr. Eun-Jung Byun**

Friday, 18th of July 2025, 1pm – 1:50pm

**St Stephen's Uniting Church
197 Macquarie St, Sydney NSW 2000**

Entry by note donation. Donations collected at the door.

SAVE THE DATE

WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU ON
NOVEMBER 9 WHEN WE PRESENT,
'VISIONS OF VERDI' - THE LATER OPERAS,
AT MOSMAN ART GALLERY.





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