

GERMAN-AUSTRALIAN OPERA GRANT



WIESBADEN REVIEW

Edition 15 / November 2024

James Young - 2024 -

James had his first experience on stage at Hessisches Staatstheater Wiesbaden (HSW) very recently and is loving it:



Working at HSW has been an absolute dream come true. I had the unique opportunity to begin earlier than expected because the first opera I was cast in, Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre*, was so complex that they organised special Vorproben, two weeks of advance rehearsals in June, well ahead of the usual start of the GAOG year. From the very first day, I was thrilled to spot two of my operatic heroes, Seth Carico and Sion Goronwy, in the rehearsal space. I had to pinch myself to believe it was real.

After those initial rehearsals, I travelled to Latvia for the 42nd International Hans Gabor Belvedere 2024 competition, spending ten days singing by the beach in beautiful Jūrmala. It was a great experience, and I even ran into familiar faces from Wiesbaden, like Casting Director Franziska Kaiser and Intendantin Dorothea Hartmann, who were judging the competition. Once back in Wiesbaden, we launched straight into full-stage rehearsals for *Le Grand*

Macabre. There was significant pressure since it was the first opera of the new administration and we wanted to make a strong impression.

Thankfully, our General Music Director, Leo McFall, was phenomenal. The contemporary and intricate score was made manageable by his extraordinary attention to detail and expert conducting. Leo is not only brilliant but also a genuinely kind and supportive colleague. The production, directed by Pinar Karabulut - soon to take over as head of the Schauspielhaus in Zurich - was physically incredibly active, and within minutes of rehearsals we were already drenched in sweat. It was an intense six weeks! The premiere on 28 September was a huge success, and we wrapped up the final performance on Halloween, with the reviews highlighting the immense talent across our large ensemble of soloists.

Now we are deep into preparations for our next opera, premiering in just a week. It is my biggest role of the season, and I am calling it my "Scarpia moment" because there are several scenes where I have to sing over the entire chorus, even ending with a high G. The role, Sparck in Offenbach's *Fantasio*, is a dream come true. The new German translation by director Anna Weber promises to be hilarious. I have learned so much from the musical team, especially from Taiwanese conductor Chin-Chao Lin and our Studienleiter (ed: director of studies), Holger Reinhardt. The coaches here are incredible and have offered me invaluable insights. I am beyond grateful for the chance to perform this role, and I am excited for my parents to be there for the premiere.

Beyond that, I am preparing for roles in two more new productions: Sciarrone in *Tosca* and Fiorello in *The*

Barber of Seville. Both will involve extended rehearsal periods and *The Barber of Seville* presents an added challenge: the singers will manipulate large puppets representing their characters. I have even had to learn some of Almaviva's tenor lines because I take over his puppet at various points!

Wiesbaden itself is a vibrant and beautiful city. The people are warm and welcoming, and there is always something happening. A highlight for us so far has been the ten-day Wine Festival right outside our apartment - we could hear every band from our window! Now, the city is gradually transforming for Christmas, which is very exciting. We have settled in well and absolutely love the energy here.

Although the season has only just begun, I have already made lifelong friends and incredible memories. I cannot wait to see what the rest of my time in Wiesbaden holds!



James as Schobiak in HSW's production of *Le Grand Macabre* by György Ligeti, which premiered on 28 September 2024 (production photo ©HSW)

Fleuranne Brockway

- 2019 -

Fleuranne has continued to build on her success at HSW:

I have been lucky enough to call Wiesbaden my artistic home since 2019. It has been a truly transformative experience, and I have learned so much, both personally and professionally. The 2024/25 season will be my sixth season as a full-time member of the HSW Solo Ensemble - where does the time go!

During my time here, I have sung over 18 roles, some of my favourites include the title role of *Carmen*, Charlotte in *Werther*, Dorabella in *Così fan tutte*, Hänsel in *Hänsel und Gretel*, Maddalena in *Rigoletto* and Wellgunde in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

Beyond my work at HSW, I have also had the opportunity to guest at the Bregenzer Festspiele and Verbier Festival, as well as important theatres such as Oper Frankfurt, Theater Bonn, Teatro Pérez Galdós, Saarländisches Staatstheater Saarbrücken and Oldenburgisches Staatstheater.

Living in Europe has also allowed me to participate in many international singing competitions which has helped me develop my career here. In 2023, I became the first Australian prize winner in the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels and I won the



Fleuranne (3rd from left) as La Ciesca in HSW's production of *Gianni Schicchi* (photo ©Karl and Monika Forster)

International Singing Competition in Portofino in 2022. It feels almost crazy thinking that before I competed in GAOG I was wondering if I could ever have a full-time career as an opera singer, and now I am living that dream.

This year I am excited to add three new roles to my repertoire: the title role in Offenbach's *Fantasio*, Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro* and Amando in *Le Grand Macabre*.

I am also very much looking forward to revisiting my beloved role of *Carmen* in December. I am incredibly excited for this season but I must say that I still do get terribly homesick. I

hope to be back in Australia very soon... and maybe even have a sing!



Fleuranne in a role she really loves: the title role in *Carmen* (Bizet) at HSW (production photo ©Anna-Lena Owen)



Fleuranne (2nd from right) after winning First Prize as well as Best Female Voice Award in Portofino in 2022 (CLIP Concorso Lirico Internazionale di Portofino)

**GERMAN-AUSTRALIAN
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Daniel Carison

- 2018 -

It has been a few years since Daniel sent us an update on his career moves. His news makes for exciting and inspiring reading:

The past few years have certainly been a whirlwind experience for me both personally and professionally. After winning GAOG in 2017, I spent two seasons at HSW. In that time, I sang over 12 roles and was more or less living inside the theatre. While I was thrilled to be stepping out onto such an incredible stage each night, I felt a particular yearning for more.

Wiesbaden was an excellent opportunity for me to establish myself in Germany, but breaking through the glass ceiling within the house came with its particular challenges. I knew I had more to offer vocally, artistically and physically than what the house was prepared to offer, so I made the decision to seek work elsewhere.

an artist vocally while expanding my repertoire. I have most enjoyed singing roles such as Guglielmo (*Cosi fan tutte*), Nick Shadow (*The Rake's Progress*), Enrico (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), Fred Graham (*Kiss me, Kate*) and of course the title role of *Don Giovanni*.

Travelling has also made up a great part of my work in the last few years. I had the pleasure of guesting at The Mainfranken Theater Würzburg in 2023 as Enrico and as Nick Shadow at Theater Trier in 2022.

One project which I am particularly proud of is *The Second Golden Age*. The title refers to the second great heyday of English Art Song between 1870 and 1940, where composers such as

Parry, Elgar, Somervell, Vaughan Williams, Sullivan, Bridge, Quilter and Finzi championed the revival of English song. I formed this project with long-term collaborator Rhodri Britton during the pandemic and our work was so well received that we were awarded



A selection of Daniel's roles (clockwise from above): the title role of *Don Giovanni* (photo: Christina Iberl); Nick Shadow in *The Rake's Progress* (production photo Landestheater Coburg 2022); Prinz Wladimir in *Die Zirkusprinzessin* (production photo Landestheater Coburg 2022/23)

In 2019 I was offered a Fest Contract at the Landestheater Coburg just before COVID-19 would throw the world into a spiral. I was so grateful to have a full-time job during the pandemic. While the lockdowns and theatre closures were incredibly frustrating artistically, having a wage and some financial security was invaluable.

Since joining the ensemble I have had the great privilege of singing some terrific roles. I have had the freedom and support to grow and develop as



a scholarship from the Deutscher Musikrat to expand the project. Since 2021 Rhodri and I have toured throughout Germany and internationally presenting various programmes of English Song.

In the coming season I am happy to be returning to the Landestheater Coburg and reprising my role as Peter Besenbinder (*Hänsel und Gretel*) and excited about new roles such as Figaro (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), Billy Flynn (*Chicago*) and the title role of *Gianni Schicchi*. I am also thrilled to be making another role debut with the Dortmunder Philharmonie in the title role of *Elias* by Mendelssohn.

The last few years have been most humbling and educational. As opera singers our life is spent practicing, learning, emailing and making phone calls, auditioning, recording etc., all the while trying to maintain a healthy work/life balance. So much of our work, however, permeates its way into life and dictates our schedule, health choices, sleep needs and sometimes even controls our thoughts.

While navigating some personal challenges over the last few years, it became clear to me that this job will always demand more of me than what I can expect in return. It is therefore absolutely necessary to identify that we chose this business and career because we love the artform. It is equally as important that we have supportive and loving people around us who remind us that we are on the right path and encourage us to never give up. I am so fortunate to have my beautiful partner Francesca and son Theodore along the way as I navigate this incredibly complex business.



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Michelle Ryan

- 2020/21 -



Michelle is based in Australia again after two successful seasons with HSW and a further year working as soprano with the South West Radio Vokalensemble in 2022.

We are delighted that Michelle is attending this year's GAOG Opera Finale on 16 November at The Edge in Melbourne as our special guest performer before the Grant recipient for 2025 is announced.



Sarah in Staatsoper Stuttgart's October 2024 production of *Der Freischütz* by Carl Maria Weber (photo: Ivan Yonkov)

Sarah Jones

- 2012 -

Sarah has been one of the 74 singers that make up the Staatsopernchor at the Staatsoper Stuttgart since 2017. A number of significant events in the last few years have led to new changes in both her personal and professional life:

A lot has changed in my life since my last report for GAOG. During 2019 I met Wolfgang, who would later become my husband. We had a busy and varied start to the 2019/20 season at the Staatsoper Stuttgart and I enjoyed learning new operas such as Verdi's *Don Carlos* and performing a solo as one of the bridesmaids in a new production of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*.

However, the season was interrupted by the Corona pandemic and we were only able to return to the theatre towards the end of the season to perform several innovative, socially-distanced shows (such as singing Wagner choruses outdoors in the city!). Midway through the following season, during which the chorus were mostly only able to sing offstage and distanced from each other, I fell pregnant. Wolfgang and I were married in the Black Forest in July 2021 and our son Henry arrived soon after in August.

It was difficult being cut off from my family in Australia at the time, but I was very grateful for my place in the chorus and to have the opportunity to take parental leave. After three years at home looking after Henry (he loves music and singing, as well as books and cricket!), I am just now starting back at the theatre. It is great to be singing with my colleagues again and I am looking forward to an exciting and challenging season, with premieres including Mozart's *Idomeneo*, Verdi's *Otello* and Johann Strauss' operetta *Casanova*.

Our warmest wishes to Sarah for continued success and every happiness with her husband and their young son!

Christopher Busietta

- 2009 -

When we last heard from Christopher, he was braving the cold of the North Sea and performing with Stadttheater Bremerhaven. The COVID-19 years changed all that:

It has now been sixteen years since I was the recipient of the 2009 German Australian Opera Grant. I spent the 2009/10 season singing principal roles with HSW.

During this time I auditioned successfully for Theater Augsburg and joined the ensemble in 2010, singing both character and lyric tenor roles such as Nemorino (*L'elisir d'amore*), Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*), Alfred (*Die Fledermaus*), Belfiore (*La finta giardiniera*), Witch (*Hänsel und Gretel*), Basilio (*Le nozze di Figaro*) and Steuermann (*Der fliegende Holländer*) until the change of management in September 2017. Then in 2018 I successfully auditioned for the principal lyric tenor position in the opera ensemble at Stadttheater Bremerhaven on the North Sea.

It was a major move for my family and me, but professionally it was also a concrete move to sing bigger repertoire. Over the next two years, I sang ten roles in eight new productions. My highlights were singing one of my dream roles, Prince Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*, my critically acclaimed Prince Ramiro in Rossini's *La cenerentola* as well as Prince Sándor Boris in Emmerich Kálmán's *Die Herzogin von Chicago*.

Unfortunately, the sudden arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, three months before the end of my contract, cancelled several productions I was scheduled to perform, as well as all of my upcoming auditions. During the pandemic I kept busy by starting my small YouTube channel, *Tenor with a Tea*, as well as completing my fourth album of original music. However, after a year of unemployment, including auditions for productions that eventually were cancelled, we made the decision to end the lease on our apartment and return to Australia,

which ended up taking three months due to quota flight restrictions in 2021.

Since becoming re-established in Melbourne, I have been teaching at several schools as well as maintaining a private teaching studio at home. I have managed to perform a few roles such as Liverotto in Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia*, as well as understudying Mime in Melbourne Opera's production of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, as well as a variety of concerts and oratorio. Upcoming concerts include singing tenor solos at the Camberwell Chorale 80th Anniversary Gala on 20 October and German Operetta Arias with the Robert Stoltz Society on 24 November.

Christopher recently performed tenor solos at the Camberwell Chorale 80th Anniversary Gala on 20 October and will perform German Operetta Arias with the Robert Stoltz Society on 24 November.

You can follow what Christopher does online via the following links:

<https://www.facebook.com/tenorwithatea/>

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCr5tCCh-wyonISU4i_jWSYg



... have rung for a number of GAOG singers in the last few years and we wish them every happiness:

Sarah Seebaß-Jones (née Jones) is happily married in Stuttgart, see article on p. 4.

Celeste Haworth (2015) recently celebrated her wedding in Sydney.

Brett Carter (2007) is happily married and continues to be professionally successful in Mainz.

Little feet...

have entered the lives of two of our GAOG singers, who have become first-time parents:



Henry was born in 2021 to Sarah and her husband Wolfgang.

Daniel Carison and his partner Francesca also now have a son Theodore.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR GAOG PARENTS!



Christopher performing the role of Liverotto in Melbourne Opera's production of *Lucrezia Borgia* at the Athenaeum Theatre

Emma Pearson

- 2005 -

In the 2023/24 season Emma had a very full schedule with debut roles of Armida (*Rinaldo*) with Pinchgut Opera, two parts in Richard Mills' new composition *Galileo*, Elettra (*Idomeneo*) for Opera Australia (OA) with Michael Schade and Caitlin Hulcup and finally Comtesse Adèle (*Le comte Ory*) for New Zealand Opera.

In 2023 Emma was thrilled to return to Wiesbaden and perform for St Augustine's Church for the first time in 10 years. It was a wonderful experience for her to reunite with old friends and colleagues from HSW.



Emma (centre) pictured with OA colleagues Caitlin Hulcup and Michael Schade in Sydney



Emma in the centre of her selfie with former HSW colleagues in the background. Two former GAOG recipients are Sarah Jones (2012) and Sharon Kempton (2003) (2nd and 3rd from left).

In the 2024/25 season Emma is looking forward to performing the title role in *Lucia di Lammermoor* for State Opera South Australia, as well as some other great projects which are still to be announced.

Victoria Lambourn

- 2014 -

As I write this, I am about to begin rehearsals for *Oscar*, a new work commissioned by The Australian Ballet to be performed in Melbourne at the Regent Theatre. The score, by acclaimed British composer Joby Talbot, includes an exquisite solo for mezzo-soprano (Voice of the Nightingale), and I feel greatly honoured to be giving the world premiere.

Since my last report I have performed with the Queensland and Adelaide Symphony Orchestras and given concerts in Melbourne, Canberra and Brisbane. I was recently made Associate Lecturer in Voice at the Melbourne Conservatorium, where I continue to enjoy teaching singing, lyric diction, and coaching students on the Masters of Music (Opera Performance) course. My PhD study is nearing its completion, which leaves little time for anything else. I had the great pleasure, however, to attend Celeste's wedding a few weeks ago in Sydney (ed: Celeste Haworth was the 2015 GAOG recipient).

As always, I am immensely grateful to GAOG for the opportunity to work at HSW, and I wish this year's recipient well as they embark on this wonderful journey.



Victoria in concert

Darcy Carroll

- 2022/23 -

My second year at HSW as the recipient of the GAOG was once again a fantastic and dynamic experience. I got to take on a selection of new roles, work with several new and old colleagues and friends, and further develop my skills as a singer and a performer.

I began the season with a Wiederaufnahme of Schostakovich's *Lady Macbeth von Mzensk*. It was my first ever production in Russian, which was another milestone I was nervous but excited to tick off the list. This was a challenging piece, due in equal parts to the difficult music, the unfamiliar language and the confronting subject matter. The plot was extremely nihilistic and oppressive, and as a performer I really had to step out of my comfort zone and engage with some horrible scenarios on the stage.

Next was a personal favourite of mine, Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*. The doddering, drunken old gardener Antonio was not exactly the most relatable character for me, and I did not have too much to do musically, but the whole production was such a delight that I



Darcy (left of centre) as Vicomte Cascada in the HSW production of *Die lustige Witwe* (photo ©Karl and Monika Forster)

thoroughly enjoyed being a part of it. The role of Montano in Verdi's *Otello* was similarly a smaller role in a particularly grand opera, nonetheless, taking part in such a huge, sweeping work was very much a thrill.

Another delight for me was getting to revisit the character Vicomte Cascada in *Die lustige Witwe*. Having originated the character in the premiere of the production last season, it was fascinating to get to return to a character and a production for its second run. I was interested in the differences between developing a character over six weeks for a premiere, and then later revisiting him for the much more brief two week rehearsal period which is common for re-mounted productions.

My first big premiere of the season was when I played the Sprecher/Erster Priester/Zweiter Geharnischter Mann in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. This opera is another favourite of mine, and I found the process of developing my performance as a double cast alongside the illustrious seasoned performer, Kammersänger Thomas de Vries, to be a very instructive learning experience.

The final production of the year was Verdi's *Falstaff*, in which I sang the role of the dim-witted servant Pistola. This whole production was just an absolute hoot from conception to closing night. Never has a job felt less like work, I always looked forward to playing around and having fun in these shows, and I will never forget the fabulous cast and crew who brought them to life.

I capped off this extremely eventful year by returning to Australia, where I was fortunate enough to appear as Colline in Melbourne Opera's production of *La bohème*. I was also lucky enough to be a finalist in the 100th anniversary of the Herald Sun Aria Competition. All in all, I would say this has been another lively year, and I am eternally grateful to have been given this second opportunity to sing full-time at such a well-respected house.



Darcy as Pistola (right) in the HSW production of Verdi's *Falstaff* (production photo)

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CHANGES AT HSW

Mr Uwe Eric Laufenberg, Intendant at HSW since 2014, stepped down in January 2024, after continuing the tradition of supporting and promoting Australian operatic talent that was originally initiated in 2003 under the leadership of Dr Manfred Beilharz. Mr Laufenberg navigated HSW through the difficult times of lockdown and was a passionate voice for keeping the theatre open as far as this was possible under the limitations imposed by government regulations.

He is succeeded by two new directors, who will jointly share the work as Intendantinnen (Artistic Directors): **Ms Dorothea Hartmann** and **Ms Beate Heine**. Ms Hartmann and Ms Heine started their new roles for the 2024/25 season.

In a joint statement, Ms Hartmann and Ms Heine said, "We are very pleased to be able to help shape cultural life in such an exciting and traditional city as Wiesbaden starting in 2024. As a team of two at the head of the HSW, we place the principle of dialogue at the

centre of our directorship: theatre as a place of communication, for a diverse city and region – and in exchange with the international scene."

At GAOG we are delighted that this "exchange with the international scene" means that HSW will continue to accept the winner of the GAOG into the ensemble in Wiesbaden.

GAOG and its Melbourne audience had the pleasure of Dorothea Hartmann attending last year's Opera Finale. This year Ms Franziska Kaiser, Casting Director and Head of Artistic Production at HSW, represents the opera house and joins the adjudication panel in determining the selection process for this year's Grant.

We welcome the new leadership team of Ms Hartmann and Ms Heine and wish them both future success in Wiesbaden. We look forward to working closely with them and their creative team to continue the tradition of GAOG and the support of young emerging Australian opera singers.



The two new Intendantinnen at HSW: (l. to r.) Dorothea Hartmann and Beate Heine
(photos Maximilian Borchardt)