

GERMAN-AUSTRALIAN OPERA GRANT



HESSISCHES
STAATSTHEATER
WIESBADEN

WIESBADEN REVIEW

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Nathan Bryon

- 2025 -

Nathan has only been in Germany for around four months so far, but has embraced his new position at Hessisches Staatstheater Wiesbaden (HSW) with relish:

It is hard to believe I have already been in Germany for four months! Time has flown by, and it has been an incredibly rewarding experience so far.

My journey began with rehearsals for the *Wiederaufnahme* (ed: *revival*) of *Turandot*, where I am performing the role of Pong, a role I have thoroughly enjoyed bringing to life among extraordinary colleagues. From there, I headed south to Freiburg to take part in an intensive German course at the Goethe-Institut. It was a fantastic and essential step to prepare me for the language demands of daily life and work here.

Returning to Wiesbaden I took part in Theaterfest, which marks the opening of the new season. A real highlight was giving my first public interview in German - an exciting (and nerve-wracking!) moment that made me especially grateful for my weeks of language study.

I have also been lucky to connect with some familiar faces along the way. It was a pleasure to catch up with Hans and Petra Henkell, as well as Dr David Kram, during their visits to Wiesbaden. My heartfelt thanks also go to Sharon Kempton and Fleuranne Brockway for their invaluable support in helping me settle in.

It has been a wonderfully busy period with preparations for upcoming performances of *Die Zauberflöte*, in which I sing Monostatos, as well as rehearsals for an exciting new



Nathan's star was shining after being awarded the GAOG at The Edge, Federation Square, in 2024.

production of *La traviata*, in which I perform Gastone.

Living and working under a *Festvertrag* (ed: *a permanent contract*) has been a remarkable experience. The pace is fast, the schedule demanding, but every day has been such a delight. Rehearsing and performing multiple operas at once truly is a "learn by doing"

adventure - and one that makes the opportunity provided by the German-Australian Opera Grant (GAOG) all the more extraordinary.

To everyone involved at German-Australian Opera Grant (GAOG), More than Opera (MTO), and the Hessisches Staatstheater Wiesbaden (HSW) that make this opportunity possible - thank you!!

Sharon Kempton

- 2003 -



Past editions have reported on Sharon's performances at HSW and beyond, but it has been over 10 years since she has been featured. We are delighted that she is willing to share her story and give her first-hand account of life as an Australian opera singer in Germany, notching up more than 20 years in Wiesbaden:

It has been a very long time since I last shared anything about my adventures in Wiesbaden. Being the very first recipient of the GAOG gave me the privilege of meeting all the singers lucky enough to follow in my footsteps - moving their lives from Australia to Germany in passionate pursuit of their dreams.

As you may or may not know, my own dream was slightly derailed in 2014 with the inevitable Intendantenwechsel (ed: change of Intendant/CEO at HSW). I believe this is the only example in Germany where a dedicated employee can lose their position purely because of the artistic aspirations and idealisations of the new gatekeeper, the Intendant.

After 11 glorious years as a treasured member of the full-time solo ensemble in Wiesbaden, I was forced, along with 18 colleagues, to look for singing opportunities elsewhere. Naively, I assumed this would not be difficult: I was singing better than ever, I had 40 main stage roles on my CV, and I was still a true Bühnentier (ed: stage "animal"). Yet audition after audition, I was told I was fabulous, but that the

roles I sang so well could be filled by singers half my age for half the cost. After one audition in Darmstadt, the blunt message was: "Die Anfängerin sind halb so teuer wie du" (ed: The beginners are half as expensive as you).

Still, I kept going. Around this time, a teacher I had started studying with told me that perhaps I had to accept that my career was over (I was 44!). She informed me that the average professional singing career lasts only eight years - and I had already far surpassed that. "Maybe it's time to find something else," she said. "After all, every soprano dies twice." Fortunately, comments like that only fuel my determination to prove people wrong!

Meanwhile, on a personal level, my marriage ended. In November 2015 I moved out of the apartment I had shared with my (then) husband and into a smaller place with my two beloved children, Harry and Olivia. The challenges intensified: finding singing opportunities while raising two children as a single mother was not easy, and I relied heavily on the loving support of my close-knit community of friends.

My big break came when the new Intendant found himself unable to cast the very difficult role of Gräfin de la Roche in *Die Soldaten* (Zimmermann) for the opening of the 2016 Maifestspiele. Originally written for a

dramatic mezzo, the role is almost impossible to sing due to the extreme acrobatic range required. Honestly, had I not been desperate, I may never have accepted it. But I knew that if I could master this role, it could be my chance to get my proverbial foot back in the door of my beloved HSW. With two children aged 7 and 11 depending on me, my focus was fixed on Wiesbaden.

The opera was a raging success. I impressed everyone - most importantly, the Intendant. I seized the opportunity and arranged to speak with him, sharing my personal situation and asking if there were any roles he could offer me for the coming season. He immediately gave me Erste Dame in *Die Zauberflöte* and Gerhilde in *Die Walküre*. And so began my return to the stage where I had quite literally grown up. I could once again support myself and my two wonderful children, and new opportunities began to arrive each year.

In 2018 I covered Elisabeth in *Tannhäuser* and had the thrill of singing my debut performance without orchestra rehearsals or stage runs - one of the most exciting nights of my operatic career. I also jumped into *Die Fledermaus* as Rosalinde with just weeks to learn the role. Many other opportunities followed. I left Gretel behind and embraced the role of Gertrud, the broom-maker's wife, a role I still sing today.



Sharon onstage at her beloved HSW opera house, her second home

And now, Wiesbaden welcomes yet another CEO! This season I am thrilled to be part of the new queer operetta *Alles Liebe*, singing the role of a lesbian character opposite Fleur Brockway, who plays my wife. Always something new to learn, always new characters to explore! I am also performing Gertrud at the Staatstheater Mainz this Christmas. Two operas are enough to keep my passion alive - and I now have other passions too.

In 2018 I began studying Life Coaching with a college in Australia. The program was largely online, and when the pandemic hit in March 2020, everything shifted to Zoom - perfect timing for me. The eight operas I had lined up for that year suddenly vanished, and I found myself with time on my hands. In the first months I sewed masks to cover rent and expenses, while also working tirelessly on my coaching diploma, which I completed in May 2020. The following month, I launched my coaching business <http://www.sharonkempton-coach.com>

Over the past five years, I have coached performers worldwide, worked with OA young artists, and spoken at universities across Australia about the importance of mindset. I created the Performance Success Formula, a mini-course called Master Your Audition Mindset, and I wrote a



Sharon's two children, Olivia and Harry, have inherited Sharon's infectious smile

book: *Ten Tips for Your Next Audition* <https://sharonkempton-coach.com/tentipsforyournextaudition-ebook>. Beyond performers, I have coached doctors, professors and other professionals, helping them achieve meaningful transformations both personally and professionally.

Since May this year, I have also been part of a wonderful initiative by the Lutheran Church here in Wiesbaden: *Singen Macht Stark*. Through this program, I visit kindergartens in Klarenthal, Dotzheim, and Kohlheck, teaching small children the joy of singing, language and movement through music. It is an absolute delight, and I truly feel I am making a difference in their young lives.

As for my amazing children: Harry is now 21 and has just started his apprenticeship as an airplane engineer, while Olivia, at 17, has begun her Abitur, which will keep her busy for the next three years. And so, my adventures in Germany continue. As I approach my 55th birthday this November, I am proud to say that 11 years on, I am still singing - still defying that so-called "average" eight-year career span.

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Fleuranne Brockway - 2019 -

Fleuranne reports on some of the highlights of the past year, even as she continues to perform at HSW:

I have just begun my 7th season as a full-time employee at HSW, which I still call my European home. Highlights of the coming season include debuting the role of Lel in Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Snow Maiden*, taking part in two world premieres, and returning to one of my favourite title roles - *Carmen*.

The past year has been especially memorable: I became the first Australian winner of the Concours Musical International de Montréal. Competitions are never easy, but being able to represent Australian talent on the world stage in such a

renowned international competition was truly an honour.

In July I made my long-awaited artistic return to my hometown of Perth, singing Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly* with West Australian Opera. The last time I sang in my home city was just before I won GAOG in 2018, so it definitely felt like a full circle moment for me.

I have learned so much from my time in Europe, and it means a great deal to me to be able to come home and share how my artistry has developed. I still have so much to learn, but I am eternally grateful for being able to live this amazing life making magic onstage.



(from top to bottom) Fleuranne at the Concours Musical International de Montréal, in the HSW production of *Broadway* (photo @Lucas Anton) and as Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly* with West Australian Opera (production photo)

James Young

- 2024 -

James has reached the end of his year-long contract with HSW but shares exciting news for the coming season:

My year in Wiesbaden, after winning the 2024 GAOG, was one of the most extraordinary and artistically rewarding times of my life. It was truly life changing, and I will always be grateful for it, especially to Dorothea Hartmann and the judging panel who entrusted me with this opportunity.

The season began with Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre*, a production that involved much of the ensemble. It was the perfect way to meet colleagues who quickly became lifelong friends. On my very first day I was stunned to see Seth Carico in the room, a singer I had admired for many years. Hearing him live was an unforgettable way to begin, and I realised I had finally arrived at the place I had always dreamed of. Other cast members, including Welsh bass Sion Goronwy who has become something of a mentor to me, and the inspiring Cornel Frey as Piet, made the experience even richer.

Working with General Music Director Leo McFall was another highlight. His precision, detail, and kindness inspired the entire orchestra, and the energy he created in the rehearsal room was palpable. Many colleagues spoke

about how special it felt, and it truly set the tone for the season. Director Pınar Karabulut brought extraordinary vision and creativity to the production. As Schobiak, even though the role was small, I found myself on stage almost the whole evening, running wild through her inventive staging. It was a production I will never forget.

Immediately afterwards came the opera I had most anticipated: Offenbach's *Fantasio* in a new production by Anna Weber. This was my biggest and most demanding role to date, and a milestone in my journey as an emerging artist. The part pushed me to my technical and dramatic limits, at times almost Wagnerian in its demands, and it required me to project over both orchestra and chorus at full strength. The performances went very well and I received amazing feedback from industry experts. This role opened many doors for me and I am deeply grateful to Franziska Kaiser for her support throughout.

One of the most special moments of the year was having my parents in the audience for *Fantasio* in November. It was an experience I will always treasure.

Soon after came an exhilarating period of performing in two operas at once. First was *Tosca*, with the incredible soloists Massimo Cavelletti, Sinéad Campbell-Wallace, and Otar Jorjikia. Sitting in the room during rehearsals

for Act II, one of opera's most dramatic scenes, was unforgettable. I kept thinking how much people would pay just to hear what I was experiencing every day. These singers generously shared advice and even lessons and they became both mentors and friends.

At the same time I was rehearsing *Il barbiere di Siviglia* in Nicholas Habjan's brilliant puppet production. Although I was only singing Fiorello and the Ufficiale, in this staging the character acted almost like a puppet master, controlling much of the action. I was perhaps most nervous about this performance because the entire production relied on millimetre precision and it took the full five weeks of rehearsal to get everything working seamlessly. It was an extraordinary delight to work with someone as detailed as Nicholas, and the payoff was enormous. People were clapping in the middle of arias and literally jumping out of their seats at the end.

A central figure during this time was Kapellmeister Chin-Chao Lin, with whom I worked closely on both *Fantasio* and *Tosca*. He is a meticulous and dedicated musician and I loved discovering new aspects of the scores with him. This was especially true in *Fantasio*, where the new German translation allowed us real artistic freedom. His commitment to the craft was inspiring.

Towards the end of the season, I sang a joint *Liederabend* with my good friend, baritone Wooseok Shim. Alongside songs from Schubert's *Schwanengesang*, I performed works by Britten, Finzi, and the Australian composer William James. Perhaps the highlight of the evening was the duet Wooseok and I sang in Korean, a beautiful language for the voice.

In my final months in Wiesbaden, I was entrusted with an enormous opportunity: a guest engagement at Theater Trier as Dulcamara in *L'elisir d'amore*. Balancing this with my Wiesbaden schedule was intense, commuting four hours each way between Trier and Wiesbaden, all while performing *Tosca* and *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and rehearsing *L'elisir*. At the same time, I flew to London to audition for the Joan Sutherland and Richard



James (2nd from left) as Sparck in HSW's production of *Fantasio* (photo ©Thomas Aurin). Fleuranne Brockway (2nd from right) played the title role of *Fantasio*

Bonynge Bel Canto Awards, eventually reaching the finals in Sydney and winning. The Dulcamara in Trier was another life changer, attracting the attention of agents, critics, and industry professionals. I was also deeply honoured that Hans Henkell travelled all the way to Trier to attend one of my performances.

Soon after I won the Emerging Bass Prize at the Concorso Lirico Internazionale di Portofino, supported by the International Opera Awards, another milestone that grew directly out of the experiences Wiesbaden gave me.

What comes next is equally exciting. In my first month at Wiesbaden, I auditioned for Theater Heidelberg and was offered major roles for their upcoming season: Faninal in *Der Rosenkavalier*, Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte*, Dancaïro in *Carmen*, and soloist in both Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* and Brahms' *Ein deutsches Requiem*. To be entrusted with these roles in the final season of the current intendance is an enormous honour, one I could not have achieved without what I learned in Wiesbaden.

My time in Wiesbaden was the realisation of my ultimate dream. It exceeded even my wildest expectations. I often tell people that every day there felt better than the last, and I know I will never forget this extraordinary chapter of my life. Though I am sad it has ended, I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity and for the unforgettable year that changed my life.

Congratulations to James for his recent win at the 101st Herald Sun Aria on 26 October!

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Sarah Jones

- 2012 -

Sarah reports on life with the Staatsoper Stuttgart after returning from maternity leave:

In September 2024 I returned to my position at the Staatsoper Stuttgart for my first season since taking time off following the birth of my son, Henry. It was good to be back onstage and singing with my colleagues again, although juggling the theatre schedule with my family responsibilities did bring up some new challenges!

We had a busy and varied season comprising eighteen different operas and concerts, from a controversial new work for an all-female cast and chorus, *Sancta*, and new productions of *Idomeneo* and *Otello*, to Mahler's *Symphony No. 8* with our orchestra in Stuttgart's main concert hall, the Liederhalle.

After a trip home to Tasmania with my family in August, I am now about to start the new season in Stuttgart. We have some exciting repertoire coming up, including Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* and Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites*. The season concludes with a new production of *Turandot*, which I last sang with OA in 2012, just before moving to Germany!



Sarah in the costume of the Staatsoper Stuttgart for their new production of *Otello* (photo: Ivan Yonkov)

Daniel Carison

- 2018 -

Daniel has been kept busy both professionally and personally:

After receiving the GAOG I spent two seasons at HSW and sang 14 different roles within the space of 20 months. Shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic hit Europe I auditioned for a Festvertrag at the Landestheater Coburg and immediately joined the ensemble.

Since moving to Coburg I have been tremendously active artistically and personally. In the past five seasons I have had the pleasure of singing some dream roles and been able to continue developing through the repertoire I have been fortunate to sing. Some notable roles from the past seasons have been the title roles of *Don Giovanni*, *Gianni Schicchi* and *Elias* as well as roles such as *Figaro* (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*), *Peter* (*Hänsel und Gretel*), *Enrico* (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), *Papageno* (*Die Zauberflöte*), *Guglielmo* (*Così fan tutte*), *Nick Shadow* (*The Rake's Progress*), *Billy Flynn* (*Chicago*) and *Fred Graham* (*Kiss me, Kate*).

Aside from being predominantly occupied with opera I have still managed to remain very active in the world of Art Song. During the COVID-19 years I established a new song project with my colleague and dear friend, Rhodri Britton (who I was fortunate to meet while working in Wiesbaden). The Second Golden Age pays tribute to the great forgotten English song composers of the late 19th to early 20th century. In the past years Rhodri and I have presented numerous English song recitals throughout Germany and England and the response has been tremendously positive.

In the coming season I look forward to having fewer productions and more time to devote towards auditions elsewhere. It is also fortuitous that I have more time up my sleeve as I am also happy to announce that I am recently engaged. In the 2025/26 season I will give three debuts as *Pappacoda* (*Eine Nacht in Venedig*),

Schaunard (*La bohème*) and Belcore (*L'elisir d'amore*). In the summer of 2026 I very much look forward to making my Concertgebouw Amsterdam debut with the Nord-West Deutsche Philharmonie.

After six successful seasons in Coburg I believe it is now time to take the next step towards a bigger house where I can embrace new roles and challenges. In the meantime I am enjoying the experience of being a father to my



Daniel as Pappacoda (the macaroni cook) in *Eine Nacht in Venedig* (above centre) and as Schaunard in *La traviata* (below), both new productions for the season 2025/26 at Landestheater Coburg



beautiful son, Theodore, and I am thrilled to be able to marry my beautiful fiance Francesca in May of 2026.

I remain eternally grateful to GAOG for opening the door to a career in Germany for myself and so many other fabulous artists.

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Darcy Carroll - 2022/23 -

Since his return to Australia Darcy has been busy singing for a number of Victorian opera companies:

In February I was involved in Melbourne Opera's production of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* at the beautiful Royal Exhibition Centre. It was a suitably grand location for such a huge production. I played the role of Konrad Nachtigal. It was my second production of *Meistersinger* after having played Herman Ortel as my very first production with HSW back in 2022.

In June I was the baritone soloist in More Than Opera's *BRUNNHAiLDE* -

A Wagnerian Concert Experience. Developed by David Kram, the work condenses the entire Ring Cycle into one performance. This was a thrilling project, and I was excited to get the opportunity to record an album in a studio setting for the first time.

In July I once again portrayed Colline in BK's production of *La bohème*. This time instead of a theatre, we were performing in the middle of a shopping centre. Performing in unusual locations really adds spice to the life of a performer, and I thoroughly enjoyed this production.

My most recent production has been rehearsing for months and opened just last weekend, once again at the shopping centre in Moe! I am currently engaged with Lyster Touring Opera Company, taking the production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* to regional Victoria. I am playing the role of the old fat knight John Falstaff. It is my first time donning a fat suit, a fake beard and a pair of antlers all at once, but it has been a delightful and rewarding challenge thus far.

To round out the year I have two upcoming performances with Victorian Opera. In October I will be part of the chorus for their production of *Katya Kabanova*. In November I will be playing the role of Al/The American/Tweedledum in their production of *Boojum*!



Darcy as John Falstaff in Lyster Touring Opera Company's production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (production photo)

Celeste Haworth

- 2015 -

A lot has happened since I last wrote a report for GAOG (ed: that was our edition in 2018).

I realise it has been 10 years since I first stepped onto the Wiesbaden stage, and what an adventure it has been, despite the lost years of COVID-19 and the changes wrought on the opera industry.

I am now a permanent member of Opera Australia (OA), and feel very honoured and privileged to be able to call the Sydney Opera House home. I have sung the role of the Monitor in *Suor Angelica*, Flora in several adaptions of *La traviata*, performed many Great Opera Hits Concerts, sung First Norn in *Götterdämmerung*, covered the role of Erda in both *Siegfried* and *Das Rheingold*, and La Ciesca in *Gianni Schicchi*, as well as the role of the ugly stepsister Dorothée in *Cinderella*, all for OA.

I have had engagements outside of the national company, most recently they were as the alto soloist in Mahler's *Symphony No. 2* for the Kuringai Philharmonic, the alto soloist in Mendelssohn's *Elijah* for the Willoughby Symphony Choir and Orchestra, recitals for the NSW Wagner Society and the Italian Cultural Institute, the alto soloist for Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* and Saint-Saëns' *Requiem*, both for Voces Caelestium.

Aside from my singing commitments I also created and produced a podcast mini-series for OA's production of *Madame Butterfly*, called *Behind the Scenes: Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour*. I loved doing this, although it was done in the space of two weeks which I would not recommend to anyone who does not enjoy strong coffee!

My career was featured as part of the Panasonic Campaign to promote their camera LUMIX, which was a wonderful adventure. I was also very honoured to receive recognition in the form of two awards: the George and Nerissa

Johnson Memorial Scholarship and the Australian Opera Awards Committee Silver Award.

In 2023 I travelled to Europe once more, which was a joy as I had not been back since my treasured time in Wiesbaden. Along with coaching upcoming roles, I was signed by the agency Vienna Music Connection.

I had every intention of returning to capitalise on this success, and I hope to do so again but my personal life took a joyous turn: I was married in August 2024 to a wonderful man, and then realised another life-long dream: our honeymoon resulted in the birth of our daughter in June 2025. Motherhood has been my most beloved role that I have performed, but I very much look forward to returning to the opera stage in the near future.

All of the achievements and joys on this operatic path would not have been possible without the first step provided to me by GAOG. I applaud all the finalists and cannot wait to see what success awaits them!



Celeste as Flora Bervoix in *La traviata* (left) and as 1st Norn in *Götterdämmerung* (above), both OA productions



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www.mto-gaog.com

[https://www.staatstheater-wiesbaden.de/](http://www.staatstheater-wiesbaden.de/)

Christopher Busietta

- 2009 -

Christopher has settled back in Melbourne after more than 10 years in Germany and has established himself as a teacher as well as continuing to perform:

It has now been seventeen years since I was the recipient of the 2009 GAOG. In that whirlwind year with HSW, I was extraordinarily busy, singing eight principal roles (and two understudies!) as well as various concerts with HSW, jumping in as Dr Cajus in *Falstaff* with Theater Aachen, studying German as well as other languages, taking singing lessons and auditioning for many agents and theatres in Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy and England. I had also recently become engaged and was away from my fiancé in Australia for most of the year.

I auditioned successfully for Theater Augsburg, flew home and got married, then returned to Germany to join the ensemble in 2010. I sang 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 der Steuermann (*Der fliegende Holländer*), as well as many musicals, concerts and opera balls, until the change of management in September 2017. During this time I performed as a guest artist with Theater Aachen, Landestheater Niederbayern, Theater Magdeburg, Staatstheater am Gärtnerplatz (Munich) and Oper Frankfurt. My son was also born during this period and spent his formative years with fond memories of Bratwurst, Brezel and Apfelkuchen.

After finishing in Augsburg, I successfully auditioned for the principal lyric tenor position in the opera ensemble at Stadttheater Bremerhaven on the North Sea in 2018.

I finished up my two year contract in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, having sung ten roles in eight new productions. The highlights included 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 cancelled several productions I was scheduled to perform, as well as all upcoming auditions. Eventually, as the pandemic stretched on and on, we made the decision to cancel the lease on our apartment and return to Australia in 2021, so that our son could have a more stable place to start school.

Since becoming re-established in Melbourne, I have been teaching the next generation of singers at several schools by day. By night I have been maintaining a private teaching studio at home alongside a busy performing schedule. I have continued to perform with Melbourne Opera as Liverotto in Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia*, understudying Mime in the Bendigo *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and Ulrich Eisslinger in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, as well as a variety of concerts and oratorio. My next concert is with the Robert Stoltz Viennese Musical Society on 24 November, celebrating 200 years since the birth of Johann Strauss II with arias and duets from Strauss as well as Robert Stoltz.



Christopher (centre) performing the role of Ulrich Eisslinger in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in Melbourne Opera's production at the Royal Exhibition Building. Another GAOG recipient, Darcy Carroll (top left), performed the role of Konrad Nachtigal (photo@Robin Halls)