

THE RICHARD DIVALL PROGRAM

NEWSLETTER 2 - 2025



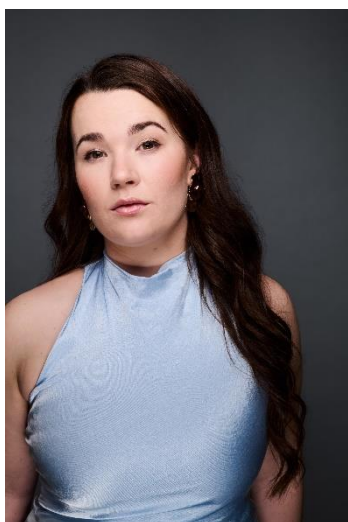
WELCOME TO THE RICHARD DIVALL PROGRAM MEMBERS 2025 to 2026

We have many new faces in the Richard Divall Program following on from the wonderful group who were with us from 2023 to 2025. We do not really say goodbye to those singers, many of them will continue to work with us in the future. We do, however, say farewell to Caitlin Weal who is moving to Leipzig where she has been offered a place in the prestigious Hochschule für Musik und Theater “Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy.”

Livia Brash is returning to the program for a second year and two members are moving from ‘developing’ to ‘emerging’ artists. Livia recently won the Sydney Eisteddfod. Breanna Stuart, who is one of the members moving from a developing to an emerging artist has just won the Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyng Sydney International Song Prize. Livia and Breanna are both finalists in the upcoming Herald Sun Aria on October 26th at the Melbourne Recital Centre. New program member Sidra Nissen is a finalist in IFAC Handa Australian Singing Competition (the Mathy) which will be held on September 25th. Sidra and new program member Hartley Trusler are both finalists in the Opera Scholars Australia Aria competition.

The singers have commenced the program with weekly coaching sessions preparing them for all that is ahead, along with their singing lessons with their private teachers, language assessments and studies, movement and intimacy workshops and the tenors all recently had a wonderful session with super tenor Shanul Sharma. We are just about to commence rehearsals for the Richard Divall Program production of ‘Cosi fan tutte’ which will open at the Athenaeum 2 on October 30th, with further performances on November 5th, 8th and 9th. As with our wonderful Figaro production, this will be sung in English and performed with an orchestra. The production will feature new program members along with Livia Brash, Asher Reichman and Henry Shaw.

Meet our new EMERGING ARTISTS 2025 TO 2026



BREANNA STUART

Tasmanian-born Breanna Stuart is a soprano based in Melbourne, Australia. In 2023 Breanna graduated with a Masters of Opera Performance from the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. Her other qualifications include a Bachelor of Music (Melbourne Conservatorium of Music), an AMusA in Classical Voice, and Diploma of Music (University of Tasmania).

Breanna made her professional debut as Ianthe in Lyric Opera of Melbourne's Green Room Award winning production of *IPHIS*. Her other theatre credits include *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *Suor Angelica* (both Melbourne Opera), *The Grumpiest Boy in the World* (Victorian Opera), *Die Zauberflöte* (Melbourne Conservatorium of Music), and *The Consul* (ACOCO). Breanna also recently participated in the world premiere of Meta Cohen's *Kiss My Sword* with Lyric Opera of Melbourne.

In 2024 Breanna participated in the Master Course in the Interpretation of German Lied at the Franz-Schubert-Institute in Austria. Breanna was a 2023/2024 member of Opera Scholars Australia and was awarded first prize in both their 2024 Art Song Competition and 2024 Aria Competition. This year Breanna has also been awarded first prize at the Warrnambool Eisteddfod and Mildura Eisteddfod Aria Competitions, the Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyng Sydney International Song Prize and is a Herald Sun Aria finalist.

HEULEN CYNFAL

Originally from North Wales, Heulen is a classically trained soprano now based in Melbourne. A graduate of the Royal Academy of Music in London (BMus and MA Voice under Lillian Watson), she also trained at the prestigious Chetham's School of Music, Manchester from the age of 16. She is currently continuing her vocal development under the guidance of mezzo-soprano Roxane Hislop.



Heulen's operatic roles include performances with Opera Cymru and British Youth Opera. Her solo work has seen her perform in concerts across the UK, US, and Canada, and more recently across Melbourne, where she has sung with the Melbourne Welsh Male Choir at venues including St Paul's Cathedral and MLC Kew.

A winner of the prestigious David Ellis Blue Riband at the 2023 National Eisteddfod of Wales. Heulen has also been a finalist in the Bryn Terfel and W. Towynt Roberts Scholarships, and has participated in masterclasses with artists such as Rebecca Evans and Simon Lepper.



SIDRA NISSEN

Melbourne based Mezzo-Soprano Sidra Nissen joined Opera Scholars Australia as a Graduate Scholar in 2025. She completed her Bachelor of Music degree in 2023 at The Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. Her performance career began with the Victorian Opera Youth Chorus Ensemble (VOYCE) and she made her professional debut with Victorian Opera in *Il Mago di Oz* (2022), and subsequently, *Cheremushki* (2023). Sidra has received numerous awards including: First place Oratorio/Art song category and runner up in the Warrnambool Eisteddfod final.

(2025) She was the winner of both the Robert Salzer Foundation Scholarship for Best Female Singer and Ian Field Memorial Award for

Outstanding German Language Interpretation at the 2023 National Liederfest Competition

Sidra has been selected as a finalist in this year's IFAC HANDA Australian Singing Competition

where she will compete in Sydney in September. She is also a finalist in the OSA Aria competition.

In Australia, Sidra studies under Suzanne Johnston and has had the opportunity to learn from

Deborah Birnbaum, Professor Graham Johnson OBE, Janice Chapman, Neil Semer, Bryan Wagorn, and Bryan Zeger in London, New York and Italy.

JOSHUA ERDELYI- GÖTZ

Tenor Joshua Erdelyi-Götz was born in Melbourne. He works predominantly in the medium of music, voice being his primary instrument and passion.

Josh completed his Master of Music Performance at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music in 2018 as a baritone, and after graduating began transitioning to tenor.

As a tenor, Josh has participated in several fully staged operas as both Principal and chorus member. These operas include: *Acis and Galatea* (Coridon), *A Husband at the Door* (Florestan Ducroquet), *Maria Stuarda* (Chorus), *Werther* (Schmidt), *Fledermaus* (Alfredo), and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (Chorus and Apprentice role).

In 2016 and 2017, Josh was a member of the Gertrude Opera Young Artist program and worked with distinguished conductors and musicians such as David Kram, Brian Castles-Onion, Michael Louis, Neil Semer, and Noëmi Nadelmann.

Josh recently made his principal debut with Melbourne Opera singing the first Philistine in *Samson et Dalila*.





HARTLEY TRUSLER

Hartley is a Melbourne-based baritone originally from Perth, Western Australia. He graduated from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts in 2020 with a Bachelor of Music before completing his Master of Opera Performance at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music in 2023. He has been a member of Opera Scholars Australia since 2023.

Hartley's performance credits include an Apprentice in Melbourne Opera's production of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, the roles of Monostatos (*Die Zauberflöte*) and Lysander (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, as well as Pluto (*Orpheus in the Underworld*) and Eisenstein (*Die Fledermaus*) at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. He appeared as Grump 2 and ensemble in Victorian Opera's *The Grumpiest Boy in the World*, ensemble in their production *The Selfish Giant*, and ensemble in Melbourne Opera's *La Bohème* and *Samson et Dalila*. Hartley is a finalist in the OSA Aria competition and recently won numerous award in Eisteddfod by the Bay. Prior to commencing his vocal training, Hartley trained as a classical ballet dancer at the WA Conservatoire of Classical Ballet.

RETURNING PROGRAM MEMBER

LIVIA BRASH

Soprano Livia Brash is the 2025 the winner of the Sydney Eisteddfod Opera Scholarship, and a current finalist in the Herald Sun Aria. In 2025, Livia covered the role of Eva (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*) and performed Musetta (*La bohème*) for Melbourne Opera, later reprising the role for BK Opera. She made her debut as Rusalka for Boroondara Arts' *Opera in the Park* and premiered Kevin March's *Song for Dark Days* with Lyric Opera of Melbourne. She also appeared in two major Melbourne Recital Centre projects: the animated, condensed Ring Cycle *Brünnhilde* (performing Rheinmaiden, Erda, Sieglinde, Brünnhilde, and Guttrune) with More Than Opera, and Chloe Charody's song cycle *Truth in the Cage* with Nightingale Performing Arts. Upcoming performances include her debuts as Abigail (*Nabucco*, The CoOperative) and Lady Macbeth (*Macbeth*, BK Opera), as well as Fiordiligi (*Così fan tutte*, Melbourne Opera).



Livia is also a prize-winner of several of Australia's most prestigious competitions. She has received the Opera Foundation for Young Australians Dalwood-Wylie AIMS Award and the AIMS Sundell Award, which supported her studies at the Vienna State Opera. She was a finalist in the Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyngé Bel Canto Competition for two consecutive years (placing third, then second), and named a finalist in the IFAC Handa Australian Singing Competition.

DEVELOPING ARTISTS 2025 TO 2026



L to R – Uma Dobia - Cen Wei - Nicholas Matters - James Penn

The Richard Divall Program has a developing artists program for singers of great potential. This program is aimed at building singers to emerging artist level. This year we are very pleased to welcome three new developing artists and one returning developing artist.

Uma Dobia is a coloratura soprano, holding both a Bachelor of Music (Performance: Classical Voice) and a Master of Music (Opera Performance) from The University of Melbourne. During her masters Uma performed the role of Tytania in their 2022 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as well as the roles of Fairy 2 (*Fairy Queen*), Amy (*Little Women*) and Amore/Valetto (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*). and made her professional opera debut as Bessie/Helen II in *The Spare Room* workshop with Monstrous Theatre in January 2023. Uma was previously a member of Opera Scholars Australia, and as part of the ACOCO Emerging Artists Program, Uma has performed as Milly in *Figatroll*, Anna Gomez in *Endure* and was involved in workshopping new Australian opera.

Cen Wei moved from China to Australia and began his Bachelor of Music degree at Monash University in 2016, where he laid the foundation for his classical vocal training. From 2019 to 2021, he was a member of Opera Scholars Australia. Cen went on to pursue advanced training and successfully completed his Master of Opera Performance at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music in 2023. During his master's program he appeared in *The Selfish Giant* and *The Grumpiest Boy in the World* with Victorian Opera. His university performance credits include Monostatos in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, the Chinese Man in Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*, and Snout/The Wall in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Nicholas Matters is a Melbourne-based tenor specialising in musical theatre and opera. He completed a Diploma of Musical Theatre at Box Hill Institute in 2016 and a Bachelor of Music at the Australian Institute of Music in 2018. His interest in classical music led to his selection for Opera Scholars Australia (2022–2024). In June of 2025 he completed his Honours degree Music Performance graduating with First Class Honours. Nicholas is the resident tenor of the Victorian State Concert Orchestra and is known as a soloist/cantor in Catholic churches across Melbourne. He made his professional ensemble debut with Victorian Opera in English Eccentrics. He is once again working with Victorian Opera in August 2025 as a member of the ensemble for Abduction and in November 2025 as a member of the ensemble for Boojum. He recently won second prize in the Lieder section of the Eisteddfod by the Bay.

James Penn is an emerging tenor and conductor, returning as a developing artist this year. He began his musical training as a boy chorister at All Saints church, St Kilda East. He holds a Bachelor of Music Performance from the Victorian College of the Arts, and a Graduate Diploma in Music from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. In 2016 he co-founded BK opera. His roles include Turiddu (Cavalleria Rusticana), Camille de Rossillon (The Merry Widow), Lucentio (The taming of the shrew), Frederic (the Pirates of Penzance), Ralph Rackstraw (HMS Pinafore), Rodolfo (La Bohème), Pollione (Norma), Beadle Bamford (Sweeney Todd), Don Curzio (Marriage of Figaro), and the title role in Werther. For Melbourne Opera James recently covered the role of Zorn in and sang an apprentice role (Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg) and was the cover Messenger and first Philistine (Samson et Dalila).

This program is rewarding, successful and costly to run! The core of the support comes from the Sylvia Fisher Fund through the Australian Communities Foundation and the Ian Potter Foundation. We are incredibly grateful to both organisations. The program is also supported by Friends of Melbourne Opera, the Mietta Foundation and private donors. If you wish to become a donor please contact info@melbourneopera.com.

