

THE RICHARD DIVALL PROGRAM

NEWSLETTER 3 - 2025

Our new Richard Divall Program members have had a very busy first six months. Their journey began with a lovely Friends of Melbourne welcome event at the Savage Club. Our 'four tenors' (also a feature of the welcome concert) had a wonderful masterclass with the internationally acclaimed tenor Shanul Sharma, plus we have held our monthly



program nights, movement/stage intimacy workshops, recitative sessions, along with personalised singing lessons, language lessons and coaching. They have been honing their repertoire and performance skills at numerous concerts and events, ending the year with another Friends of Melbourne Opera event, this time the Christmas Concert at the Alexandra Club.

The tenors above (left to right) Joshua Erdelyi-Gotz, Raymond Lawrence, Shanul Sharma, Cen Wei, James Penn & Nicholas Matters.

Throughout August to October the major focus of activities, was learning, rehearsing and performing a highly entertaining and successful production of **Così fan tutte** at the Athenaeum Two, giving most program members significant performance opportunities in this fully staged opera complete with orchestra.



Left to right: Hartley Trusler, Sidra Nissen, Uma Dobia, Breanna Stuart, Cen Wei and front, Henry Shaw.

Nothing is better for the training and development of singers than confronting and conquering the demands of putting on an opera with a public outcome. This production has proved this point again with all involved making substantial leaps in their skills, knowledge and professional practice.

There were four performances in total, in what became a 'sold-out' season with Livia Brash and Breanna Stuart sharing the role of Fiordiligi, Josh Erdelyi-Gotz and Cen Wei sharing the role of Ferrando and Heulen Cynfal and Uma Dobia sharing the role of Despina, each of these artists having two performances each. Sidra Nissen performed the role of Dorabella and Hartley Trusler performed the role of Guglielmo with Richard Divall Program past program member Henry Shaw singing the role of Don Alfonso at all performances.



Livia Brash & Joshua Erdelyi-Gotz



Hartley Trusler & Sidra Nissen

What the critics said:

"Showcasing the extraordinary talents of emerging and developing artists of the Richard Divall Program in a simple yet spirited staging, the work finds both sparkle and sincerity under Program Director Suzanne Chaundy's direction."

"Chaundy sets this two-act work as a period piece rom-com in the vein of Bridgerton – uncluttered, eye-pleasing costumes, minimal fuss and a sharp focus on character action and interplay are its hallmarks. All the while, Chaundy and her uber-passionate cast reach into the comic aspects with brilliantly entertaining results."

"It's a beautifully sung, well-paced production that reminds us why this School for Lovers remains such a perfect work over two centuries on with its mix of beauty, wit and heartbreak that still feels strikingly human. Here, it is revealed with warmth, intelligence and hilarity you'll want to feel again and again
(Paul Selar, Australian Arts Review.) Full review [here](#).

"Judging by the capacity-sized audiences for the two final performances, word had spread that this Così should not be missed. In addition to be highly entertaining, the cast comprised exceptionally gifted young singers, some of whom have been winning major singing prizes galore around the country."

“Outstanding singing and acting, inventive direction, and a professional 20-piece orchestra (complemented by the excellent Raymond Lawrence on keyboard for the recitatives, even when he was also acting as conductor), plus brief but hearty contributions from members of the Melbourne Opera Chorus, illustrated just how well an opera can succeed without elaborate staging. A simple floral panel formed the backdrop and minimal furniture and props were deftly handled by the singers. The focus was on the music and the interactions between the characters – and the audience.”(Heather Leviston, Classic Melbourne.) Full review [here](#).



Heulen Cynfal & Henry Shaw

We are so grateful to the Sylvia Fisher Fund and the Angior Family Fund for specific funding support for this production as well as the Athenaeum Theatre.

Since our last newsletter several of our current singers have had significant competition success. Livia Brash won the 2025 Sydney Eisteddfod Opera Scholarship and the inaugural Sylvia Fisher Award in the 2025 Herald Sun Aria. Sidra Nissen won the Marianne Mathy Scholarship at the IFAC Handa Australian Singing Competition and first place in the Opera Scholars Australia Singing Competition. Breanna Stuart won Sydney International Song Prize in the Dame Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyngel Bel Canto Awards, and the Dame Elizabeth Murdoch Prize in the 2025 Herald Sun Aria. Hartley Trusler placed third in the 2025 OSA Aria competition and has been awarded The Maroondah Singers Memorial Scholarship for 2026.



Above: Sidra Nissen at the IFAC Handa Singing Competition.

Below: Livia Brash at the Sydney Eisteddfod.





The 'FOMO Welcome Event' at the Savage Club

The end of 2025 sees our singers busy with many engagements including The People's Messiah with the Essendon Choral Society which was on Sunday December 7th and 'Christmas with Sylvie Paladino' at Cruden Farm on December 13th. Early engagements in 2026 include Mozart by Moonlight at the Royal Botanic Gardens on Sunday February 1st (book [here](#)) and the Beleura Valentines Day concert on Thursday February 12th (book [here](#)). Plans are afoot for a master class with the wonderful Helena Dix early in 2026. Information about this will be available in the new year.

We wish all our supporters a joyous festive season and know you will look forward to seeing these singers continue to grow as artists throughout 2026.

The core of our support comes from the Sylvia Fisher Fund 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.

Suzanne Chaundy – Richard Divall Program Director

Thank you to Robin Halls for the *Così fan tutte* photography.

