

## **A World of Opera – HSBC and Opera Australia at Sydney Opera House**

Keen to open this music genre up to an unfamiliar audience, HSBC and Opera Australia's 'A World of Opera' (16 July) brings together a handful of working young artists and upcoming stars to highlight how opera is for everyone.

While I've always been drawn to it, I can understand how opera can be inaccessible and unappealing; it's often hard to follow, melodramatic, long winded, and even snobby. But it can also be silly, funny, timeless, and extremely relatable. This balloted free concert in the Sydney Opera House broke down some of the barriers that can make opera inaccessible, to bring this phenomenal art form to a wider audience.

Beginning the concert was Petah Cavallaro singing 'Ritorna vincitor' from Verdi's Aida. She demonstrated great vocal control, in her aria which showcased her full-bodied, luscious tone. Imogen-Faith Malfitano sung Verdi's 'Caro Nome' as well as Puccini's 'O mio babbino Caro'. Filling the Joan Sutherland theatre with her bright yet warm tone, Malfitano had an extremely engaging and watchable stage presence which brought extra sparkle to her performance of Gianni Schicchi's best known aria.

Sophie Salvesani's bell-like tone resonated exquisitely in her performances of Gounod's Jewel Song and Mozart's incomparable Queen Of The Night aria. Her presence had a great stillness, and while she didn't feel quite ready for the Mozart, her coloratura in the latter half was impressive and I would love to see her perform this in a few years' time. Opera Australia chorus member, Tomas Dalton gave a commendable performance of some of the best-known tenor repertoire. While it felt unsettled to begin with, Dalton's performance warmed throughout the afternoon and his 'Nessun Dorma' provided a fantastic finish to the concert.

Danita Weatherstone's performance of Micaela's aria from Bizet's Carmen was extremely refined and showed great musical sensitivity. Her vocal prowess shone, particularly in the softer passages through her passaggio. Singing Puccini's 'Donde lieta uscì', Rebecca Gulinello gave a heart-wrenching performance of this beloved aria. While her lower notes felt somewhat breathy at times, her upper register was powerful and resonant, and she had an incredibly magnetic stage presence. The event was rounded out by baritone, Alexander Sefton, who brought fun and lightness to his Pappageno aria while his rich tone grounded the 'Pearl Fishers' duet beautifully.

Under the baton of Brian Castles-Onion, the small orchestral ensemble carried the work superbly. The balance between singer and orchestra was fantastic, accentuating, and reinforcing the young singers' voices without ever overpowering. The ensemble and singer were at times out of sync with each other, something that perhaps could be helped with a slightly different logistical stage set up next time. Castles-Onion also hosted the concert; introducing each piece and giving context around who the character was, what the aria was about, and where it fitted into the storyline. While his opera knowledge was remarkable, Castles-Onion's commentary was often hard to follow, got mixed up and would have benefited a great deal from some trimming.

While the pieces were selected from audience favourites, some of the repertoire choices felt driven by a desire to showcase a particular aria rather than picking work that suited to the voices of the singers they had. I would have loved to have seen more duets in the programme, and a few less arias, as I find the chemistry between characters so engaging to watch and where so much of the magic happens.

Highlighting an array of French, German and Italian arias, 'A World Of Opera' was a spectacular afternoon concert that gave the audience members a taste of the illustrious and breathtaking world of opera.

★★★★☆

[Review: HSBC A World Of Opera @ Sydney Opera House \(scenestr.com.au\)](http://scenestr.com.au)