



The Open Vocal Finals Concert of the Australian Concerto and Vocal Competition was performed on a warm Sunday afternoon to an audience looking forward to a high quality and engaging afternoon of music. Vocalists had to prepare a program of either four or more contrasting arias from Opera/Oratio, or work/s for Voice and Orchestra – a demanding 20-30 minutes of performance.



Mikayla Tate (Sydney) opened the afternoon with a lovely and confident rendition of Haydn's *Auf starkem Fittiche Schwinget sich der Adler stolz*. Part of Haydn's *Creation*, and written in celebration of the creation of birdlife, you could clearly hear the connection to the text in the lyricism of Tate's voice. Tate continued with Cleopatra's entreaty to Caesar for his love – *V'adoro, pupille* from Handel's *Giulio Cesare*. This was a demanding sing and as such, the emotional commitment was possibly a little lost in supporting the technical requirements. Tate's next selection was the haunting *The Tower*, with moments of Britten's typical dissonance, well negotiated. Closing out Tate's set was *Depuis le jour* (from Charpentier's *Louise*), a young woman ecstatically singing of her love. This was my favourite of Tate's pieces; her understanding of the aria's meaning was apparent, and made for a very pleasing performance.

Bianca Bacchiella, a Townsville local, was the afternoon's next performer. Her first piece was *Elle a fui, la tourterelle* – Antonia's song of sorrow over her lost love from Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* was sung with conviction, and her nerves were fully in control by the conclusion. The second piece that Bacchiella performed was Bach's *Mein gläubiges Herze, frohlocke*, which she followed with the aria *Per la gloria d'adoravi* from Bononcini's *Griselda*. Her concluding piece, Menotti's dark and unsettling lullaby *The Black Swan* from his dramatic opera *The Medium* suited the tone of Bacchiella's voice – a clever and unexpected selection, hauntingly performed. I am sure there will be much more to come from such a talented performer who is still so early in her singing career.



The third performer of the afternoon was Cassandra Wright, from Brisbane. From the first phrase of her opening offering, *Gathering Berries* from Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Snow Maiden*, the audience could be confident they were in for a polished and secure performance. Wright showed great fluidity in the rapidly moving passages of this piece. Her strength as both a singer and actress were evident in the sudden change of mood as she moved into her second piece *Je dis que rien ne m'épouvante* from *Carmen* (Bizet). From the recitative through to the body of the aria, Micaëla's bravery in the face of terror was strongly conveyed. Mozart's *Batti, batti, oh bel Masetto* (*Don Giovanni*) followed, and the difficult recitative was again mastered with poise, as were the many quickly-moving semiquavers sections. Wright's final performance of Gounod's *Je veux vivre* was a lilting waltz well captured through the tempo and key modulations. Perhaps (understandably) a little vocally fatigued by this point, this was still a charming performance of a very difficult piece (the fourth note is a high B flat).

The final performer of the afternoon was Christina The from Perth, whose first piece was the incredibly well known and formidable *Der Hölle Rache* – colloquially known as *The Queen of the Night* Aria from Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. This piece requires great flexibility at great speed and a very high tessitura, soaring up to F6, which was well handled by The, who poured much emotion into her performance. Her second selection was a change of pace into *Mi restano le lagrime* where she successfully communicated Alcina's sad resignation of unrequited love. Puccini's *Chi il bel sogno di Doretta* and Handel's *Rejoice Greatly* rounded out The's four selections – the latter a very difficult piece with seemingly endless coloraturas and embellishments which were for the most part handled well.



At the conclusion of the performances, adjudicator Cheryl Baker OA awarded the Norton Challenor Award and Perpetual Trophy to Mikayla Tate (Most Promising Vocalist), 3<sup>rd</sup> prize to Bianca Bacchiella, 2<sup>nd</sup> prize to Christina The, and 1<sup>st</sup> prize to Cassandra Wright, who also received the Audience Choice Award. All performers and accompanist Maryleigh Hand should be congratulated on what was a lovely and well-prepared afternoon of music.



**Review by**  
**Claire Davies, Townsville**