

Gala Vocal Concert

Townsville Civic Theatre
2pm 23 July 2017

On Sunday afternoon, 23 July 2017, an enthusiastic and supportive audience at the Townsville Civic Theatre enjoyed performances from four young singers, all finalists in the Open Vocal Section of the Australian Concerto and Vocal Competition. Each singer prepared a demanding and substantial program of four to five arias from Opera/Oratorio or major works for Voice and Orchestra.

The first performer of the afternoon was **Morgan England-Jones** (Brisbane), accompanied by Jan Whelan.



Her first piece, *Gold is a Fine Thing* (also known as the *Silver Aria*) was a glorious choice, full of changing metres and melodic lines. England-Jones followed it with a spirited and character-filled performance of *Nun eilt Herbei* from Nicolai's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. This contrasted starkly to the next aria, the dark and haunting *Embroidery Aria* from Britten's *Peter Grimes*, in which England-Jones' showed great control and beautiful tone. It was a definite highlight of her program. She concluded her program with the ever-popular Musetta's Waltz from *La Boheme*, again capturing the flirtatious nature of Musetta perfectly. England-Jones is a charismatic and engaging soprano with the promise of great things ahead in her vocal career.

Blake Parham, a young tenor from Sydney, was the next performer with Maryleigh Hand at the piano.

He opened his program with a fine rendition of *Io gia t'amai* from *Rodelinda*. Parham captured the Handelian spirit perfectly, with a lyrical and dramatic performance. This was followed by Gluck's tragic *Unis des la plus tender enfance* from *Iphigenie en Tauride*, and *O Colombina* from *Leoncavallo's Pagliacci*. Parham seemed much more comfortable with the latter, capturing the beauty and character of Harlequin's serenade of love to Columbina. Next in the program was the challenging *Szumią jodły na gór szczycie* from *Halka* by Polish composer Moniuszko. Parham let fly in this epic piece, only faltering slightly near the conclusion. He rounded out his program with an assured performance of Tom Rakewell's aria *Here I Stand*, from *The Rake's Progress* by Stravinsky.





The third performer of the afternoon was **Rosa Zardus** (Brisbane), accompanied by Maryleigh Hand.

Zardus presented a program of opera favourites, starting with Handel's haunting *Piango la sorta mia* from *Giulio Cesare*. Her voice really resonated with the despair of Cleopatra as she is sent to prison following the apparent death of Caesar. Zardus followed a similar theme in her next aria, Mozart's *Ach, ich fühl's*, Pamina's only aria in *The Magic Flute*. Zardus appeared to relax considerably in the Mozart as opposed to the Handel, with more character and connection with lyric. Her final two arias from *Manon (Adeiu, notre petit table)* and Puccini's classic *Chil bel sogno di doretta* from *La Rondine*, were charmingly performed, however some vocal fatigue detracted from the overall presentation.

The final performer of the afternoon was Ingham local, **Bianca Bacchiella**, accompanied by Maryleigh Hand.

This exciting soprano presented a wonderfully diverse program, starting with Bach's *Zerfließe mein Herze* from *St John's Passion*. The weeping/grieving vocal lines were beautifully realised, with just a hint of restraint. Bacchiella then presented two arias from Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, interestingly by two different characters. Cherubino's *Non so piu, cosa son* was bright and perfectly captured the aria *agitato* style, contrasting starkly with the Countess' lament of the loss of her husband's love in *Porgi, amor*. However it was in Bacchiella's final aria that she really came into her own, with a stunning performance of *Monica's Waltz* from *The Medium* by *Menotti*. A challenging piece, Bacchiella displayed the full gamut of emotions necessary for a most effective performance.



At the conclusion of the afternoon, adjudicator Peter Coleman-Wright AO awarded 3rd place and the Most Promising Vocalist award to Bianca Bacchiella, 2nd place to Blake Parham, and 1st place to Morgan England-Jones. England-Jones also received the Audience Choice Award.

Congratulations to all performers and accompanists for a most entertaining and inspiring afternoon of music.

Review by
Rachel Cairns, Townsville