

Opera Foundation Australia **2014 Awards and Scholarship – WINNERS**

MEDIA RELEASE

19 October 2014

Tonight Thomas Strong, 31 year old Tenor from New South Wales, was announced as the 50th winner of the prestigious *Opera Foundation Australia* 2014 Lady Fairfax New York Scholarship; mezzo-soprano Margaret Plummer as the winner of the 2014 Vienna State Opera Award and conductor Burhan Guner as the 2014 Berlin New Music Opera Award winner at the Finals concert, Eugene Goossens Hall in Sydney's ABC studios.



“We warmly congratulate Thomas Strong in winning the **2014 Lady Fairfax New York Scholarship** in this important anniversary year. A singer with prodigious talent, he will greatly benefit from the exclusive access to prestigious international learning opportunities that this Scholarship offers,” says Anna Cleary, Chair of *Opera Foundation Australia* and Lady Fairfax’s daughter.

“Opera Foundation Australia’s purpose of helping young Australian artists reach their potential through unique learning opportunities in the best opera houses around the world is as relevant today as it was when my mother established the organisation in 1963. The New York Award was the first to be offered by the Foundation and I am so proud to help celebrate its 50th anniversary tonight.”

“Thomas’s performance with *Nessun Dorma & Mamma quel vino e generoso* in the Finals concert tonight demonstrated his outstanding ability in operatic performance and potential to be one of Australia’s great performers,” she says. “Whilst choosing a winner at this elite level of performance is never easy, and the six Lady Fairfax New York Scholarship Finalists are all exceptional performers, there can only ever be one winner.”

“I am ecstatic about this incredible opportunity from Opera Foundation Australia. I am so excited about the future of learning and the unique experiences that lie ahead of me in New York. Thank you all for your support in this invaluable process.”

Valued at \$43,000, the Lady Fairfax New York Scholarship provides the opportunity for the winner to undertake an intensive period study in New York with teachers, vocal coaches, language coaches and répétiteurs. It also includes a return airfare to New York, support for study costs and a living allowance.

Also announced tonight were the winners of the **2014 Vienna State Opera Award** for a stage experienced opera singer – **mezzo soprano Margaret Plummer** from Sydney - and the **2014 Berlin New Music Opera Award** winner **Perth-based Conductor Burhan Guner**.

The Adjudicators for both **2014 Awards** and the **2014 Lady Fairfax New York Scholarship** were Anke Höppner, Emma Matthews and Malcolm Batty.

In 1963 Lady Mary Fairfax AC OBE founded **Opera Foundation Australia**. Her leadership, vision and support has enabled the Foundation to develop a strong, credible and lasting reputation in providing prestigious international operatic Awards and Scholarships to Australian operatic performers.

Opera Foundation Australia provides unique international experiences for young Australians, which in turn enrich the Australian opera companies and audiences.

Over its 50 years, *Opera Foundation Australia* has achieved outstanding results and launched many glittering careers, including:

- Providing over \$5 million in funding and support.
- Over 290 Awards & Scholarships have been provided and over 190 of these have resulted (past and present) in contracts with Opera Australia.
- Previous Awards and Scholarships have been granted in over 10 international opera centres - New York, London, Vienna, Berlin and Cologne.

Opera Foundation Australia is a highly credible, reputable and ethical organisation with Deductible Gift Recipient status and receives no government funding. For further details on our individual Awards and Scholarships, past winners and people involved in the organisation, please refer to www.operafoundationaust.org.au

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ABOUT THE WINNER

Thomas Strong

Thomas Strong was born in Albury and raised on a farm in outback NSW. He completed his Bachelor of Performing Arts at the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts in 2006 and a Masters of Music (opera) at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in 2013. Thomas has had the opportunity to perform in many opera and theatre companies in roles and as part of the chorus. These include the Melbourne Opera, Victorian Opera and West Australian Opera companies. Since completing his Masters he has been in the 2014 Semi-final for the German-Australian Opera Grant, has won the Ronald Dowd Memorial Award and is one of the six finalists in the Herald Sun Aria.