

MELBA

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NEWS

SEPTEMBER 2011



PURE DIVA

**Cheryl Barker's tribute to Joan Hammond
Queensland Symphony Orchestra,
conductor Guillaume Tourniaire and
pianist Timothy Young**

**Arias by Verdi, Tchaikovsky, Korngold, Offenbach, Purcell and, a
Joan Hammond favourite encore, Home Sweet Home.**

The ravishing Australian soprano Cheryl Barker has an important career in all major opera houses and concert halls. She is widely celebrated for her riveting performances.

Pure Diva is her personal tribute to her teacher, Dame Joan Hammond, a disc, Barker says, "that feels as if it's been a long time coming".

The orchestral scenes are high drama from the first note to the last reverberation. Cheryl's glorious lyric soprano rides the wave of **Guillaume Tourniaire's** orchestral texture in grand operatic scenes, arias and songs made famous by Hammond. Cheryl's visceral portrayals of operatic heroines convey the full emotional depth of these multi-dimensional characters in extremis.

The tributes with piano accompaniment provide a contrast to the preceding drama, encore pieces beloved of Joan Hammond, the biggest selling recording artist during the war. Accompanying is pianist **Timothy Young**.

Hammond's recording of **The Green Hills of Somerset** became a best seller and Cheryl includes it as a homage here. The delightful rarity – **Shadows** – is a song written for Hammond by the Australian composer Ronald Settle.

Conductor Guillaume Tourniaire directs the **Queensland Symphony Orchestra**, drawing performances that bring the emotional landscape vividly to life.

Illuminating CD Notes are by Peter Burch of Musica Viva and the late vocal commentator John Steane, who was an insightful witness to Dame Joan Hammond and all the great singers of her era and those that followed.

Hammond made best selling recordings of popular arias such as Love and Music (*Vissi d'arte*) from **Tosca**, One Fine Day (*Un bel di*) from **Madama Butterfly**, and They Call Me Mimì (*Mi chiamano Mimì*) from **La bohème**. Lauretta's then unknown aria from Puccini's **Gianni Schicchi**, O My Beloved Daddy, (*O mio babbino caro*) was first released as the B-side to Tosca's Love and Music on a 78rpm disc. The coupling became the first operatic recording to sell more than one million copies and went on to win a gold record in 1969. It has never been out of the catalogue since.

Cheryl Barker's relationship with Melba Recordings stretches back almost to the label's beginning with Puccini=Passion, her acclaimed 2003 collection of arias with Richard Bonyngue conducting Orchestra Victoria.

**WHAT'S NEW AND WHAT'S COMING FROM
MELBA page 4**



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Happy Birthday Nellie

A Gala Dinner was held in June to celebrate Nellie Melba's 150th Birthday. What better way to honour the greatest Australian of her time, than with the help of Australia's greatest entertainer of all time, Barry Humphries AO CBE. This was a night to remember!

Soprano **Rosamund Illing** and emerging Diva, **Kiandra Howarth** together with pianist

Timothy Young [pictured] performed some of Nellie's favourite songs and arias. The setting was the historic and recently restored Myer Mural Hall with its superb murals by renowned artist Napier Waller.

The funds raised from the Dinner will support a recording with the Australian Brass Quintet and Timothy Young.



MR MALCOLM LONG'S TRIBUTE TO MELBA RECORDINGS

When in the 1980s, as Director of ABC Radio, I approved a working visit to the Salzburg Festival by music producer and friend Maria Vandamme, I had little inkling that Maria's experiences there would significantly contribute to her embarking on an extraordinary journey.

Working in Salzburg with some of the world's greatest musicians; in an environment which celebrates musical excellence from around the world, Maria realised that Australia was all but invisible. Her decision to establish Melba Recordings was a characteristically direct and energetic response to that problem. And those two words 'Melba' and 'recordings' reveal the touchstones of her mission.

Maria named her venture in honour of Dame Nellie Melba... probably the most famous Australian woman of all time. And she was one of the first great singers to make recordings. Recordings that would both take her Australian voice into homes

[continued on page 7]



ODE TO MYER MURAL HALL by Mr Barry Humphries AO CBE

Tonight as we forgather
In the Myer Mural Hall
I take you to a far-off time
Almost beyond recall

When the Paris end of Collins Street
Was elegant and pretty
Before Melbourne struggled to
Resemble parts of Kansas City

When Pioneer buses roamed
And Ansett flew the skies
And ladies wore hats and gloves
And gentlemen wore ties

When records were played with needles
Before grown men gelled their hair
And before all those kerosene tins
Piled in Federation Square

Before fish was christened seafood
Before organic free-range chooks
When Toorak matrons would have died
For tea with Dallas Brooks

When Delphine sold those lovely frocks
With the '50s frills and flounces
And the sexiest men in Melbourne
Were radio announcers

When the Manchester Unity
Was our solitary skyscraper
And sport was on the back page
And not the whole damn paper

When at 6pm the hotels closed
And you couldn't get a drink
When the trams were a subtle cream and green
And the yellow pages pink

We used to sit here with our mothers
Sipping tea and lemonade
And watch that very new phenomenon
A mannequin parade

Beneath Napier Waller's frescoes
Of legend and of myth
We would watch June Dally-Watkins
And if we were lucky Bambi Shmith
Box Hill is now an inner suburb
Which once lay on the fringe
And in those days we had Prime Ministers
That didn't make us cringe
Who could have dreamt the Melbourne Club
Would have McDonalds as a neighbour
Or that the Australian Labor Party
Could possibly misspell Labour
A lot of people ask me
If I'm going to retire
Just because I well remember Myer's
Before we learnt to call it Myer
But did Dame Nellie Melba
Ever tire of giving voice
So long as there's a possum listening
I don't have any choice

**For I love my life upon the stage
And I love being on the telly
And I only hope I'm going to have
More farewells than Nellie**

The Guests

- 1 Barry Tuckwell, Heidi Victoria, Barry Humphries
- 2 Maree Sharkey, John Sharkey
- 3 Barry Humphries, Jeanne Pratt
- 4 Barry Humphries, Michelle Roberts, Peter Farnbach, Maria Vandamme, Timothy Young
- 5 Peter Wyllie-Johnston, Maureen Northam, Charles Northam
- 6 Dame Elisabeth Murdoch, Barry Humphries
- 7 Barry Humphries, Lady Southey, Matthew Shelmerdine
- 8 Igor & Claire Zambelli
- 9 Prof Andrew Vizard, Rosey Vizard, Malcolm Long
- 10 Barry Humphries, Lady Potter
- 11 Barry Humphries, Philip Corne (CEO Louis Vuitton)
- 12 Stephen Charles, Joan Clemenger
- 13 The Governor, His Excellency Alex Chernov, Mrs Chernov, Ian Perry
- 14 Malcolm Long, Helen Long
- 15 Barry Humphries, Coralie Stow

GUESTS AT THE NELLIE MELBA BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION





NEW & COMING RELEASES FROM MELBA

Leslie Howard plays the two Rakhmaninov piano sonatas in a unique coupling – the mighty first sonata together with the original version of the second, the last and one of the greatest of the Russian Romantic sonatas.

“Leslie Howard must surely be the most prolific pianist active today; his 100 CD (and still growing!) anthology of Liszt’s piano music recognised in the Guinness Book of Records as the largest recording project undertaken by any artist. His other great passion has been for Russian piano music, with several important premiere performances to his credit, and this is the first recording to offer the coupling of Rakhmaninov’s two Piano Sonatas with the original published version of the Second, rather than its later revision. Rachmaninov was famously sensitive to criticism, so it was quite common for him to revisit works that had not been well-received. In the case of these two Sonatas – the First composed in 1907, the Second six years later – the public response to both appears to have been reasonably positive, so it is unclear why the composer quickly resolved to revise the Second; the reaction of contemporary

performers to the work’s technical difficulty may have been a factor. When that (significantly shorter) revision did eventually appear in 1931, the original version fell out of currency and has only recently been restored to print – much preferring the original, Howard characterises it as “the last and one of the greatest of the Russian Romantic sonatas”. Ever the tireless musicologist, Howard has also thrown in four little-known miniatures, written by Rakhmaninov for his own edification.

“As regards the recording, let me say only this – I own a lot of solo piano music, and have long agonised over which is the single finest recording. I agonise no more, because this is!” A rare overseas venture for Melba, the recording was made at Potton Hall in the UK, a regular venue for Hyperion (and others), so its quality can only be explained by the involvement of star engineer Tony Faulkner. Great packaging sets the seal on another compelling release from this consistently innovative label.”

Andrew Fawcett Audiophilia [UK]

TIMOTHY YOUNG PLAYS GEORGE FREDERIK BOYLE *World premiere recordings of Boyle’s piano music*

Exciting Australian pianist **Timothy Young** whose Melba debut on *Volupté* with Roger Benedict has attracted extravagant praise makes his solo debut with Melba. Timothy introduces to the world the music of George Frederick Boyle, a great Australian performer, teacher and composer whose previously neglected works are exciting revelations. Boyle was born in Sydney in 1886. As a 14 year old virtuoso he made concert tours throughout Australia and New Zealand. Mark Hambourg assisted him to make the journey to Berlin in 1905 in order to undertake studies with Busoni. On Busoni’s recommendation he was appointed to replace Ernest Hutcheson as head of the piano department at Baltimore’s Peabody Conservatory. After 12 years at Peabody, Boyle was appointed to the Curtis Institute and in 1927 to the Juilliard School of Music where he remained until 1940. A stroke forced him to cease teaching and relearn how to play the piano, which he did. Boyle resumed teaching and playing until his death in 1948.

The Philadelphia Record said of Boyle: “He occupies an exceptionally brilliant position in American musical life. As a composer of striking individuality, he has achieved an international reputation; as a pianist,



he is unquestionably one of the most interesting of his period; and as a teacher, he has gathered about him a group of students and admirers whose enthusiasm recalls the vivid stories of the followers of Liszt. He is the sort of inspiration American students stand most in need of and in this capacity his gifts are priceless. His power of expression amounts to positive genius.”



ELAN

Saint-Saëns' Ballet Music.

Incandescent French conductor **Guillaume Tourniaire** continues a collaboration with **Orchestra Victoria** which is propelling it into the international spotlight. What began with the recording in 2008 of the opera *Hélène*, written for Nellie Melba by Saint-Saëns, is now followed with a recording of the lost ballet music from his rare operas *Les Barbares*, *Henri VIII*, *Ascanio* and *Étienne Marcel*. Saint-Saëns at his best and unashamedly providing an opportunity for the orchestra to shine. This is Melba Recordings' seventh collaboration with Orchestra Victoria in ten years. These include three recordings conducted by Richard Bonyngue, one with Simone Young and one with Barry Tuckwell: all important Australians.



Australian Piano Trios
The Benaud Trio

At the forefront of Melbourne's explosion of chamber music development is the vibrant **Benaud Trio**. They combine the greatest commitment to performing excellence with a sparkling Australian lack of reverence to po-faced classical music. These three young instrumentalists bring great life and verve to their performances of important Australian repertoire showing that contemporary music can be exciting, attractive and capture the imagination. In this ensemble there is more going on than just an earnest dedication. There is a real excitement for the music. They capture the essence of youth, talent and joie de vivre together with a steely determination to achieve greatness.

Southern Cross Soloists perform *Smoke Encrypted Whispers* Poetry by our leading indigenous poet **Samuel Wagan Watson** with interludes composed by 23 Brisbane based or born composers: Tom Adeney, Damian Barbeler, Will Barton, Betty Beath, Gerard Brophy, Lisa Cheney, Stephen Cronin, Robert Davidson, Brett Dean, Paul Dean, Louise Denson, John Gilfedder, Keryn Joyce, Stephen Leek, Liza Lim, Mary Mageau, Kevin Man, Freeman McGrath, Richard Mills, Peter Rankine, John Rodgers, Marianne Scholem, Stephen Stanfield and Toby Wren. The group's unique combination of instruments allows for the performance of a wide variety of repertoire.



Arcadia Lost
Sydney Symphony Orchestra;
Conductor Mark Wigglesworth,
Soloists Michael Dauth and Roger Benedict.
A feast for lovers of British music, Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending* and *Flos Campi*, and Benjamin Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem*, with Mark Wigglesworth conducting The Sydney Symphony Orchestra and soloists Michael Dauth, violin and Roger Benedict, viola. Tenor Steve Davislim, pianist Benjamin Martin and the Hamer Quartet perform Vaughan Williams' *On Wenlock Edge*.



Brahms & Schumann Sonatas,
Paul Dean and Stephen Emmerson.
Australia's most poetic instrumental soloist clarinetist Paul Dean teams up with distinguished long-time collaborator pianist Stephen Emmerson, to provide winning performances of two masterpieces of the Romantic clarinet repertoire.

Asher Fisch plays *Liszt Operatic Paraphrases*
Popular piano music of Liszt with the acclaimed Adelaide Ring's conductor, Asher Fisch, at the keyboard demonstrating his versatility and supreme musicianship.



The Art of Nance Grant
An important historic recording which demonstrates the artistry of the exceptional Australian soprano **Nance Grant**. We hear her in recital with pianist **Geoffrey Parsons**, and singing arias with four Australian orchestras. The collection includes music by Mozart, Donizetti, Beethoven Wagner and Strauss. Moffatt Oxenbould pens an affectionate tribute.



A Lotus Blossoming
Zemlinsky and Messiaen
Distinguished Melbourne-based **Ensemble Liaison's** debut recording on Melba of music by Messiaen (*Quartet for the End of Time*) and Zemlinsky (*Trio for Clarinet Cello and Piano*), with MSO concertmaster **Wilma Smith** joining Ensemble Liaison.
Ensemble Liaison is a chamber music partnership formed in 2006 between **David Griffiths**, clarinet, **Svetlana Bogosavljevic**, cello, and **Timothy Young**, piano.



What our friends say...

I believe it's very important that Melba Recordings are able to present so much of our music to a wide range of people who otherwise would not be able to hear such beautiful music... they promote the achievements of our artists and reach international audiences and they take great music to all Australians wherever they live, not just those fortunate to have access to the great concert halls... music is an enormous part of our culture and must be supported and encouraged to be perhaps the most important part of our culture. I'm particularly proud of the recording of Wagner's **Ring Cycle** which has won unprecedented international success. It is very important that Melba Recordings attract financial support because without it, it wouldn't be possible really to do the splendid work it's doing.

Dame Elisabeth Murdoch AC DBE

As Life Governor of the Potter Foundation and a former Chair of the Melba Foundation, I was delighted to support a series of recordings with young artists Lin Jiang, Anthony Romaniuk, Kristian Winther, David Tong, the Ng brothers and the Tinalley String Quartet. The brilliant performances captured on disc will live forever, and take these talented musicians into living rooms in the sixteen countries in which Melba's recordings are distributed.

Lady Potter AC

I am proud that Melba Recordings which was launched at Raheen in 2000 has become a voice for Australia all around the world, and is now described as "the distinguished Australian label" in the UK Gramophone magazine. It is a real success story which I urge you all to support.

Jeanne Pratt AC

Melba's excellent series of recordings with Orchestra Victoria has promoted this ensemble internationally. The respect these recordings have been accorded is most gratifying and well deserved. I am proud to be a Patron of the Melba Foundation and support its endeavours.

Lady Southey AC

An irresistible recital of Stravinsky's arrangements for violin and piano... This enticing collection of Stravinsky's music for violin and piano was written in the early 1930s in collaboration with violinist Samuel Dushkin, whose playing and musicianship the composer greatly admired. They made a symbiotic partnership at the time, performing concert tours in England, France and the USA.

The key work here is the **Duo Concertante**, a masterly and highly original five-movement "sonata" in which Stravinsky stated that he had attempted primarily to "create a lyrical work of musical versification". Yet the music includes a good deal of characteristic pungent interplay and it is in the third movement, "Second Epilogue" that the lyricism comes to the fore on Ray Chen's expressive violin and, after an infectious "Gigue" the slow closing "Dithyrambe" is given a hauntingly cool beauty.

The other works – especially arranged to fill out the programmes of the Dushkin/Stravinsky recitals – are transcription of transcriptions. But the new versions were far from straightforward rearrangements. Instead, as Dushkin told us, "Stravinsky's objective was to return to the original works and recreate the music anew in the spirit of the new instrumentation". The **Divertimento** offers a six-movement suite "after Tchaikovsky", drawn from The Fairy's Kiss, and the piquant **Suite after Pergolesi** derives from the earlier ballet, Pulcinella. The **Danse russe**, of course, comes from Petrushka and sounds catchily, rhythmically spicy here in the hands of this illustrious partnership. It is based on an even earlier transcription made in 1921 for Arthur Rubinstein, who once, in a TV programme, disparaged the composer as having no talent for melody by showing how many of his ballet tunes were originally Russian folksongs. Yet, as the **Chanson russe** from Mavra readily demonstrates, Stravinsky quite transformed this very Russian theme, even giving it a touch of gentle irony.

Throughout this highly stimulating programme, **Ray Chen** (with just the right characterful timbre) and **Timothy Young**, whose glittering pianistic upper range catches the ear again, make a superb partnership, suggesting to the listener what Stravinsky and Dushkin must have sounded like nearly seven decades ago. Incidentally, in the Pergolesi suite they have once more chosen an earlier, brilliantly virtuoso transcription, made by the composer in 1925 for the Polish violinist Paul Kochanski, and how vividly they cherish its moments of razzle-dazzle. An excellent, truthful recording balance, good notes and handsome packaging make this disc irresistible.

Ivan March—Gramophone [UK]

On the Stravinsky disc the Suite after Pergolesi isn't the familiar, but an earlier version which the composer wrote for Paul Kochanski in 1925. Although it uses virtually the same movements from Pulcinella, it's more of a virtuoso display for the violinist. It's realised here in violin playing of the highest order. It's not just Ray Chen's superb technique, but his sense of pacing in the music that is so striking: there's always time for the music to unfold, even at speed. In the Divertimento, arranged from the Tchaikovsky-based ballet, The Fairy's Kiss, Chen rightly adopts a more Romantic sound. Both he & Timothy Young are right inside the music, and this carries through to the Duo concertante, where their sense of poise and timing allows the 'Gigue' to dance, rather than just be a scramble, and the two 'Eclogues' and the final 'Dithyrambe' are passionate but not overblown.

The sound is generous and realistic. A hugely exciting debut album.

Performance *****

Recording *****

BBC Music Magazine [UK]



FROM THE DESK OF THE MELBA CEO

Melba's legacy

One of the most pertinent questions facing us in society is **whether to lead or to follow.** But this was never a consideration for Nellie Melba. Her ethos was to shoot for the stars. No person with reasonable expectations would have even considered to attempt the things Nellie achieved. But Nellie, a little Australian girl from Richmond, came to rule the world of opera and become the most famous Australian of her time.

Her example led the way and lifted the scales from everyone's eyes. Suddenly a whole generation could see what was possible. At every turning, Nellie strove to achieve the pinnacle of artistic standards. What she achieved made her a colossus on the vocal stage and an international mega star. There are many stories of her being a huge character, a monster, and a self promoter without peer. But she had the goods to promote, and everyone fell under the spell of her music making. She was the greatest performer on the world stage for 40 years.

Nellie strove to leave a legacy. Her Scottish Presbyterian roots gave her a sense of obligation to give back to society. This she did working tirelessly for endless charities and silent gift giving, using her fame positively for what she considered the most important social causes. Nellie was hugely conflicted in her need to find and anoint a New Melba. She could never quite bring herself to nominate a successor who could actually replace her in the public's affections – that was asking too much of Nellie, stretching noblesse oblige too far. But the seeds of her teaching and her example of the highest excellence resonate down to us today. Whether they know it or not, there is a tradition of great Australian singing that flows directly from her class of students. Although she never found the new Melba, her followers did create an important tradition in Australian singing.

Nellie did not want to dutifully fit in – she wanted to change the world and she did. She believed in herself and her ability to achieve greatness. And this she did through talent, determination, hard work, force of will, and the very fortunate association with sympathetic teachers here and abroad. Nellie Melba showed Australians that one of us could make it to the top of the world. The Melba Foundation is giving our musicians that same opportunity today.

The Melba Foundation believes Australian musicians deserve to be better known abroad – we want to make the world as excited about them as we are. Recordings are the perfect vehicle for creating a sense

of anticipation and excitement. From the moment an artist enters a room there is a sense of expectation in the mind of the audience for the performance to follow. No one knew this better than the canny Nellie. Her whole life was tailored to creating this grand expectation. With Caruso she was the megastar of the fledgling recording industry. For the first time, great artists could be heard in everyone's parlour. One hundred years after Melba's recordings were made, her priceless legacy offers us a glimpse of the singing of this legendary Australian.

Recordings have proved to be the most effective generators of excitement for a musician's career since their beginnings more than a century ago. Great recordings create legends! How much of our reverence for Karajan comes from our growing up with his great recordings? He was groomed as a Super Star in the golden era of the classical music industry in the 50s and 60s. There were many great conductors around, but he was the lucky one whom the famous Walter Legge decided to champion via recordings.

Australia's finest musicians deserve the vital vehicle a recording represents as well. Recordings are a proclamation of a musician's artistic achievement. Great recordings take them to the world. They make musicians immortal.

Maria Vandamme

Malcolm Long: continued from page 2

around the world and capture her voice for future generations to enjoy and admire.

In the same tradition, today, Melba Recordings is dedicated to capturing the talent of contemporary Australian musicians – around 600 so far – and making their artistry known internationally, using the most advanced recording techniques available.

Maria and her collaborators imbued with the spirit of Melba have crafted such a label with great success; attracting extraordinary international recognition and acclaim. Melba Recordings is putting Australian music on the world map. It has become Australia's global classical music recording label.

This is an important achievement for our nation.

And ... I can tell you tonight that Melba Recordings is now embarking on a project which will further strengthen its mission, through a communications medium which itself has very powerful international 'cut-through'. Melba Recordings is planning to produce a film – a film based on some fascinating episodes in Nellie Melba's tumultuous life.

It is early days. The film is still in its script stage. But the production will focus on Nellie's epic collaboration with Oscar Hammerstein to break the monopoly of the New York Met in opera in New York and, simultaneously, back in Europe her scandalous affair with the Pretender to the French Throne, Louis Philippe, the Duke of Orleans; an affair which, for a time, even threatened Anglo-French diplomatic relations. The film will, of course, also be a wonderful showcase for Nellie's music. **ML**



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