

Emmanuel Fonoti-Fuimaono



TANZOS _ MID YEAR REPORT

FIRST HALF OF THE YEAR!!!

Talofa lava to you all,

It's been a life-changing experience since being a part of the inaugural Te Pae Kōkako -The Aotearoa New Zealand Opera Studio Masters programme! I am so glad I stayed another year to study for my Masters's before heading overseas. I feel like I have grown and learned so much as an artist and person, and I look forward to what's to come for the year's second half. Here is a read of what I have been up to over the previous seven months!

FESTIVAL OPERA - DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE IN HAWKES BAY

I was fortunate to be contracted to sing one of the main roles Tamino for Festival Opera's production of Die Zauberflöte with my fellow Project Prima Volta Graduates. It was a dream to sing alongside like Emma Pearson as Princess Pamina, Kieran Rayner as Papageno, Joel Amosa as Sarastro and Kristin Darragh as Third Lady. It felt like a full circle moment to know that it was roughly ten years ago when I first got a glimpse of classical music and singing and so returning to sing the main role was a dream come true. I was in good hands with Jose Aparicio as conductor, David Harper as the orchestra and of course being at the home opera company. I spent a month building up Prince Tamino in rehearsals and enjoyed learning from everyone there as well as meeting the new generation of PPV. They had so much energy and could see them enjoy the show more as we got closer to the performance.

We went as far as the day prior to the premiere night before Cyclone Gabriel hit New Zealand and Hawkes Bay was devastatingly damaged. For days many didn't have access to power and many had to flee their homes. A few of our cast and chorus even lost their homes. This marked the second year that The Magic Flute had to be cancelled. We were so close to performing and my heart goes out to the PPV kids who were so close to performing in their first opera.

I am excited when Festival Opera announced that NZSO have offered to play a concert version for the people of Hawkes Bay and to help support and fundraise! I will be singing Tamino alongside my PPV Graduate colleagues and of course the wonderful PPV cohort of 2023.



WELLINGTON OPERA - LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR - FEB-MAR

Having to leave my family in Hawkes Bay, Jordan and I flew to Wellington. We were contracted to sing in Wellington Opera's production of Lucia di Lammermoor as Arturo and Normanno, respectively.

TANZOS made it possible for me to be a part of the opera and attend essential engagements with the programme during its orientation week. From the get-go, I felt supported that I could continue working as an artist while being a part of the programme.

Over those weeks, our production dealt with a lot of illness, and we had to be strict with testing for COVID or any symptoms, so we only really sang together the last two weeks before the premiere. I enjoyed having my little brother with me as it was his first time performing as an artist with a different opera company. Working and learning from Emma Pearson, Oliver Sewell, Phillip Rhodes, and Samson Setu was fantastic and incredibly valuable.

Through this time, TANZOS organised coachings and lessons while I was in Wellington.



TANZOS - The Aotearoa New Zealand Opera Studio

After the Lucia season, I was treated to a jam-packed week filled with singing lessons, language sessions, coachings, and more! It was great to get back into singing new repertoire after singing the same music for a while. It has been unbelievable how much I have learned over the last months in this programme.

Every two weeks, we would have a schedule filled with the following:

- Vocal lessons (with accompanist)
- Coachings
- Public Masterclasses (every two weeks)
- Stagecraft and Acting Classes
- Performance and Wellbeing Classes
- Yoga and Fitness Classes
- Song and Recit Classes
- Oratorio and Ensemble Classes

It's a singer's dream to be given this opportunity.

TANZOS - Sir Simon Keenlyside and Lady Zenaida Yanowsky visit New Zealand

So far, one of the biggest highlights for me is getting to meet Sir Simon Keenlyside and his family. Seeing my brother Alfred come home and talk endlessly about his lesson with one of his heroes was even more astounding. We have listened to his work online for so long, so it was tough to believe that we were making a conversation with him in person!

I learned so much from him, not just in the lesson room but also from observing how he is as a person. From first impressions, he cares about teaching singers to the best of his ability. He took his time to think of his wording before telling me something he wanted in our lessons, as he said he didn't want to give me advice that could be interpreted differently. Of course, everything he told me was gold.

In our masterclass with him, he wanted us to dive into detail and build into the characters from the start, whether from the words we sing, the accompaniment, the rests and pauses, the context of the piece, or our breath. He wanted us to be them, not like them. Seeing my colleagues making changes to their singing in the class made all the difference. Seeing him talk about it all was great because he is such a fantastic performer and actor.

On another note, I found it heart-warming when Simon asked about the Samoan language and the traditional necklace. He was genuinely interested and told me always to wear it and be proud.

We also got to meet his wife, Zenaida Yanowsky, who is a world-renowned ballet dancer. She retired from the Royal Ballet after being the principal dancer for twenty-three years! The TANZOS crew enjoyed her class as she taught us about performance etiquette and presentation. We worked on body warm-ups, coordination, and how to present ourselves and bow. It is essential to how we present ourselves, and it needs to be made aware of more as performers. Her class was eye-opening. I couldn't believe my posture! I'm glad she pointed it out to open up my tenor chest!

Meeting these people was such a refreshing feeling. Meeting these top-tier household names and discovering they are very down-to-earth and genuine was comforting. These people are my ideal successful artists because they have an outstanding balance of love for their art and family while also being kind human beings!

We highly thank Madeleine Pierard for making this connection and bringing her friends to New Zealand.



TANZOS - PHOTO SHOOT WITH CHARLES BROOKS

I greatly appreciate the TANZOS programme for organising this session to get high-quality headshots from a renowned photographer.

The whole experience was different when you compare your selfie skills to Charles Brooks. As a classical musician, he immediately knew what kind of headshots we needed. He was straightforward to work with and made me feel comfortable while the camera stared me down.

As someone who doesn't view myself as the likes of Brad Pitt or Jason Momoa, I felt pretty handsome in that session!

I was stoked when I received them. The photos made my resume look very professional when I handed them in for competitions and gigs.



TANZOS - CLASSES IN SESSION

After our break from our Simon Keenlyside week, I applied and submitted my audition video for an Australian aria competition called the Sydney Eisteddfod and then focused on my first TANZOS recital. The TANZOS crew were to present a solo recital, with Katherine and me doing a joint recital as part of our grades towards the Masters. For several weeks we were given lessons and coaching from top-tier artists.

I enjoyed my lessons with Nikki Li Hartliep and always felt that I was singing better and better, leading to the recital. The coaching I received from David Harper is always great, and I've always had a great time learning from him. The best thing about this is that their technique and vocal quality teachings complement each other, and it makes so much sense to me.

Andrew Crooks also coached through this time and then played for our recital. It was great to hear his perspective on singers overseas as the Head of Music at Cincinnati Opera. His expertise was vital in the success of our recital.

With the recital preparations well in order, we were still able to keep up with learning other aspects of performance like the song and receipt classes with Anna Leese, voice classes with Kristin, repertoire lessons with David Kelly, Yoga with Kailash Saraswati, language coaching with Norman Franke and more!

Katherine and I were pretty happy with our recital and are incredibly grateful to Andrew Crooks, who accompanied us that night! TANZOS felt we did well to put up a week of fantastic recitals. The work we put in from our sessions with our excellent teachers, coaches and tutors showed in our performances, and we thank all those involved.

Così fan tutte - NZOPERA

TANZOS were invited to attend and observe the rehearsals and performances of NZOpera's "Così fan tutte" production. The cast had Emma Pearson as Fiordiligi, Hanna Hipp as Dorabella, Jonathan Abernethy as Ferrando and Julien van Maellerts as Guglielmo. We also were starstruck seeing Natalie Beale Murray in action as the conductor!

We saw a scene of Ferrando and Guglielmo arguing and scuffling over their lovers, with a professional stunt coordinator there to show them how to make the movements safely. They repeated the motions until they both could perform it safely in real-time. With the actions rehearsed, the next hurdle was making the movements with music. Of course, adding the music threw them off, but they stayed with it, and it looked great by the end of the rehearsal. Seeing this small part was vital for the scene, and it was cool to see them construct from the ground up.

The singing from this cast was stellar. Emma Pearson, in particular, was such a stand-out. Her artistry is unmatched, and she blended well with the fantastic Hanna Hipp. The synergy between the cast was strong, and it showed well when we saw them perform a week later.



AUSTRALIA - FIRST TIME OUT OF THE COUNTRY

My trip to Australia will be an experience I will never forget for the rest of my life! As this was my first time leaving the country, I didn't know what to expect, but I was blown away. It was a fantastic trip full of learning, and a glimpse of what living as an artist overseas is like. A highlight of mine was singing and auditioning for a highly esteemed panel at the Joan Sutherland Theatre at the Sydney Opera House. I am forever grateful to the Te Pae Kōkako - TANZOS programme for getting me here. Have fun reading!

FLIGHT

I had quite an eventful day before jumping on that plane! I had packed my things two days ahead as I had an audition in Wellington for the IFAC Australian Handa Singing Competition preliminary round. The dates so aligned well that I would audition in Wellington in the morning and then fly to Auckland to make the Sydney flight with the TANZOS crew. I had to prepare for my longer-than-usual flight mentally. As mentioned, this was my first time leaving the country. I was super glad to have headed over with familiar faces. It comforted me, and I felt secure.

DAY 1:

After some much-needed rest, we were lucky to be near a fantastic cafe with excellent food. Fueled and caffeinated, we were ready and excited to start the day! We were warmly greeted by some of Opera Australia's staff and artists. From there, we went straight into Italian and French coaching with Nicole Dorigo - the company's language coach for all OA productions. I enjoyed working with and learning from her. I could see how strongly she felt about the language and the importance of pronunciation.

We made comparisons between conversational language to opera language. We took turns pronouncing phrases from opera. After a great session, we had a break. We met more people, including the young artists of Opera Australia. We got along well and were also keen to hear each other sing!

After the break, we had a repertoire session with Brian Castles-Onion - a well-respected conductor and répétiteur. He gave us all tips to think about when we approach new repertoire. We sang for each other and learned something valuable from the session.

I then had a great lesson with the Australian great - Glenn Winslade. We worked on warming up the body, the voice and vocalises. As I listened to my recordings, I took many of his tricks and felt that the sounds I made were much more connected and accessible. We reviewed my Mozart that I was to sing for the Sydney Eisteddfod Opera Scholarship (formerly known as the Sun Aria and McDonald's Aria). He gave me precious tips on language and relaxed, healthy singing. The "hard" phrases became the easier ones! At times I just looked back at him in awe as he would demonstrate phrases. He sounds amazing!

Katherine Wiles, a beautiful, wonderful soprano who is a full-time member of the Opera Australia Chorus, took us all on a tour around the Opera Centre, where they rehearse and make costumes, set pieces, wigs etc. we were then treated to full access to tour the whole of the Sydney Opera House. We got to see the dressing rooms, the practice rooms, the cafeteria, and the Dame Joan Sutherland dressing room! Our first day was a jaw-dropping experience!

DAY 2

The next day, we were treated to the final rehearsals of Aida at the Sydney Opera House. We arrived early to see the artists well into their rehearsal, warm and in costume.

The production was incredible! The use of technology in this work was crazy, and I am sure to pull it off would've needed so much time, work and practice. The production used massive LED screens as a set, and they moved around to form lightning and clouds, desert or water. I felt as if I was really in Egypt.

The singers were phenomenal! Seeing these professional singers do their thing and knowing they do this for a living was great! The whole cast were stars from the likes of Leah Crocetto as the distressed Aida, the powerful Elena Gabouri as Amneris and the roaring Warwick Fyfe as Amonasro, being my standouts!

We were lucky to have a class about vocal care - a crucial part of our singing is our health. We worked with the fantastic Rachel Cunningham - who stated that she's originally from Timarū! She is very knowledgeable and gave us an informative and scientific perspective on how our voices work. We analysed how our bodies affect our singing through the way we use our bodies. We discussed the many aspects of vocal health and well-being. We could see what parts we use to produce these sounds through Fred, the skinless, example doll.

DAY 3

I was ecstatic to learn from Michael Black, who is a fantastic répétiteur and was previously the chorus master at Opera Australia before being the Head of Music as well as the chorus master at Lyric Opera of Chicago. I felt that my Kiwi accent was turning more Kiwi the more I hung out with Australians, so I had to ask him if he understood whatever gibberish was coming out of my mouth!

I sang "Dies bildnis ist bezaubernd schön" and "Ah, léve toi soleil!" - which was my semifinal set for the Sydney Eisteddfod Aria Competition. I've enjoyed learning and receiving new ideas and perspectives. It was such a great lesson, and my arias felt fresh.

We then watched more Aida rehearsals, and they were smoothening some small transitions and technical issues. It was great to see how quickly the singers made changes from their last rehearsal. Although these changes were minor, the impact they made was huge. Hearing Radames (Najmidden Mavlyanov) sing out after marking most of the rehearsals was exciting. It was phenomenal!

DAY 4

We attended the general dress rehearsal of Aida, and I couldn't stop loving the music the more I sat in. Because I had never had any interest in Aida until my experience here, my appreciation for Verdi's music grew greatly. I understand that this music is huge singing, and I know I won't be singing Radames any time soon, but I do know that it will become a dream role in the well in this future for me!

We were allowed to watch Opera Australia's Rigoletto in a "Pit and Perch" scenario. The TANZOS team were given Katherine Winitana and I watched the opera in a way we weren't familiar with. It was fantastic as one of us would sit in the orchestra pit and watch how the orchestra and conductor worked together. The other would watch the opera from a side view, a story above, allowing the viewer to see the set transitions and all the chaos behind the scenes.

I enjoyed both experiences.

Pit: Seeing the conductor without a score and still never miss a beat was unbelievable. His presence was quite charismatic! The orchestra played so beautifully; I had never heard an orchestra so clean and synchronised.

Perch: the perch was interesting as I couldn't see or hear much from the side of the stage. Still, I could pick up where we were musically from the opera's most iconic bits of music. The biggest standout for me was Stacey Alleaume's Gilda and especially her "Caro Nome". I have never heard someone sing it with such ease!

DAY 5

We had the day off. I relaxed and let my body and mind process everything that had happened throughout the week.

DAY 6

We started the new week again at the cafe that became our usual spot. Well rested, we prepared to work with the conductor of Aida and the Music Director of the Scottish National Opera - Stuart Stratford, and Fiona MacSherry, the Head of Music, also at the Scottish National Opera. Thomas Johnson accompanied.

Now, it was ridiculous to think that these two highly regarded opera giants would be here to listen to the likes of us and be willing to give an audition lesson. For most of the class, I couldn't help but sit there in disbelief that we were having a session with them. Everything they said made so much sense. I was so nervous as it felt like I was at the doctors waiting to be checked up! Haha!

I sang for them, and they went straight to work. I left that session feeling good and fresh. I was the last to sing out of our cohort, and at the end of the class, I was super proud of how we all sang that day. We were nervous singing for these top opera people, and I felt very pleased to be among my five colleagues.

We were fortunate to be allowed to listen in on OA's rehearsal run of "Tales of Hoffmann" by Offenbach. We listened to the fantastic Jessica Pratt sing the doll aria from Olympia's Act, and she marked the whole thing. The TANZOS crew were astonished by how beautifully she marked the aria. It was a technical masterpiece. We couldn't believe what was coming out of her mouth. It was the sound of a professional singer who was so experienced and in complete control of her voice. Our jaws dropped very low.

DAY 7

We had a much more relaxing day as we prepared for our audition for a panel of highly positioned people from the opera world. We filmed and talked to Chris Hillock and his filming partner Jodie about our experiences in Sydney and as young artists. We could also let some nerves out by singing our repertoire with Madeleine, who kindly played and gave tips before tomorrow's big day!

This bit was major for me in my time here in Australia. Madeleine changed my repertoire. She convinced me less than twenty-four hours before my audition. I was set to sing safely. To sing arias that were more "comfortable" to sing. She said no as soon as I told her the three arias I would sing.

"Why would you do something that doesn't show you off?" Still doubtful, I sang the arias I felt were "risky", and as I finished up, she looked at my colleagues and back at me. I was convinced from there. Maddy believed in me, and my colleagues believed in me. I learned to believe in myself and what I'm capable of. I am grateful to have support like I did like that.

The repertoire I chose to sing:

Where'er You Walk - Semele - Handel
Dies bildnis ist bezaubernd schön - Die Zauberflöte - Mozart
Ah leve toi soleil! - Romeo et Juliette - Gounod

The repertoire I ended up giving the panel after knocking my head with some sense.

Che gelida manina - La Boheme - Puccini
Dein ist mein ganzes Herz - Das Land des Lächelns - Lehar
Pourquoi me reveiller - Werther - Massenet

DAY 8 - Audition Day on the Joan Sutherland Theatre stage!

Over the years, I've been the type of singer who needs to find energy instead of having too much and needing to settle down. I woke up that morning and was ready. I got worried that I was too calm and didn't feel nervous.

I had a good sleep. I had a good breakfast. I had a good call with my mum. I had been listening to my usual playlist called "Vibes" from my Spotify throughout the morning, so I guess it explained why I was so relaxed.

Waiting for my turn, the OA staff took me to a warm-up room. Thomas was playing for me there and was so supportive and fluid to my tempi. We brushed over a few arias, and I was still relaxed. The usher knocked on the door to let me know I was next.

As I walked out onto that stage, I was taken aback by the beauty of the theatre. It felt warm and comforting, and I couldn't get my head around the fact that so many legendary singers have graced this stage and made history. I was standing there. It was there for me. A thought popped into my mind about how I am; my family are people from Flaxmere, Hastings. The opera was different from our usual. This was a dream. But I am in it. It's real.

I enjoyed the atmosphere so much that I didn't hear what the panel asked me. The piano started, and I just had to jump on board! In a way, that made me calm my nerves as we had just gotten into it. I sang the Boheme aria, and then they asked for the Lehar. When I finished, they thanked me, and I was daydreaming because I had just auditioned in a major opera house! as I was gestured that I could leave.

Walking away, I was thrilled that I had changed my repertoire. I felt confident in myself, and a massive relief lifted off my shoulders.

DAY 8 - continued

We had a movement class after our auditions with a director/dancer, Shane Placentino. We enjoyed the physicality of the class and did body warm-ups, practice waltzes and even slapstick/combat. We learned how to go on our knees safely and fall in different ways. These skills are essential on stage. This class was a perfect way to shake off our singer mindset.

We had dinner and then watched Aida in its entirety. The small wrinkles were ironed out, and the show was spectacular to watch without stops. The singers were fantastic, and I cried a few times throughout. The auditorium was full. My favourite part was the horns playing when Radames returned on the horse after winning the war—a very tenorial moment.

DAY 9

We had a relaxing morning and again debriefed at the cafe spot. Some of us had coaching that day, and we also had our last vocal care workshop. It was also, however, our last day at the OA Opera Centre.

We finished our visit with parting gifts and sang Ka Waiata to thank them for hosting and taking care of us. What an experience of a lifetime! While singing, I realised that OA is very connected to its history as an opera company.

The common room we were in had pictures of every artist who had worked for the opera company for over twenty years. The thought of knowing that those singers - the likes of Dame Joan Sutherland, Richard Bonyng, Michael Lewis, Cheryl Barker, and others would've, in their time, come into that space for a cup of tea when they were on break from rehearsal astounds me. The room felt comforting.

We celebrated our last night with food, laughter, and sleep.

DAY 10

Everyone was on their way to the airport to head back to New Zealand. We all said our goodbyes as I had to stay for the Sydney Eisteddfod Competition, with the semifinals being three days away.

My partner Katherine got quite sick in the last few days and was not fit to fly, so she stayed with me. I was worried for her but glad we had each other to be around while in a different country.

Here are some of the fun times we had in Sydney, Australia



THANK YOU

I would love to thank the Dame Malvina Major Foundation for sponsoring me for the TANZOS year. This experience wasn't possible without your support. As well as this year, you have aided and taken care of me and my family for a long time, and I am incredibly grateful and honoured to be a part of yours. The foundation has been aiding singers for longer than I've been alive! Seeing the positive responses from singers when I bring up Dame Malvina's name firmly indicates all the great things the foundation has done for us. I will repeat this; I am incredibly grateful for this experience.

I would also like to thank Madeleine Pierard, who has worked endlessly for this to happen. The programme that Madeleine has set up for us has been extraordinary. Madeleine had tailored the programme for those transitioning into international studies/learning, which she had based on her own experiences and what she needed when she was a young artist in training to become a professional artist herself. We are fortunate to have her here and share the knowledge she has to share and guide future singers. This programme is a singer's dream! This Australia trip is something I will forever keep close.

My thanks go to Dame Malvina Major and the DMMF, Madeleine, and Havva Focali, my colleagues; Katherine Winitana, Alfred Fonoti-Fuimaono, Taylor Wallbank, Rhiannon Cooper, Cecilia Zhang, the wonderful Katherine Wiles, Glenn Winslade, Sharolyn Kimmorley, Michael Black, Brian Castles-Onion, Rachel Cunningham, Nicole Dorigo, Shane Placentino, Chris Hillock, Nikki Li Hartliep, David Harper, Sir William and Lady Judi Gallagher, and of course the staff and the Opera Australia company.

Love to you all,
Emmanuel Fonoti-Fuimaono

SYDNEY EISTEDDFOD OPERA ARIA SCHOLARSHIP

As mentioned in my Australia trip update, I was also in the semi-finals of Australia's most prestigious singing competition. The Sydney Eisteddfod Aria Scholarship was formerly known as the Sun Aria and, before that, was called the McDonald Aria. There have been many winners from both Australia and New Zealand - Joan Sutherland (1949), June Bronhill (1950), Richard Greager (1971), Jonathan Lemalu (1999), Anna Leese (2003), Pene and Amina Edris-Pati (2011, 2013). Seeing the list of previous winners was incredible, and I was excited to compete.

The competition was tied to winning the prestigious Lockwood New Zealand Aria Competition in November last year. Under the prize money, the Dame Malvina Major Foundation would fund for me to compete in this competition. After handing in my video submission and all the application documents in April, I received an email two weeks later that I had made the semi-finals.

So already in Sydney from the TANZOS trip, with my partner Katherine by my side, I stayed another three days from when the TANZOS trip ended. I worked with Sharolyn Kimmorley, who also offered to play for my semi-finals bracket. My arias were much more polished and classy in one session with her. Sharolyn is a master. Her concepts and teachings were easy to pick up, and I was extremely grateful to her for helping me.

I participated in two smaller classes to stay on top of my voice. I was accompanied by a fantastic pianist Su Choung. She was very supportive and played beautifully. The competitions in Australia were very different in comparison to New Zealand ones. The most notable thing was that most of the Australian singers would refrain from talking with each other. I know back at home that our New Zealand group are much tighter, and we enjoy each other's company.

The semi-finals started, and I was excited and nervous at the same time. I would never want to be an adjudicator, especially when they had to narrow the competitors from fourteen to five.

I noticed there were a few competitors who mainly cared about themselves. One competitor used the warm-up room, which was to be shared by all competitors as her dressing room. Many of us tried to use it, and she replied that she was warming up or rehearsing with her pianist. Three other competitors parked and spread their belongings in the one changing room that all were meant to use for changing outfits only. This was a very new thing for me as I know at competitions in New Zealand, we are usually very respectful and accommodating to others.

I sang Tamino's aria "Dies bildnis ist bezaubernd schön" first. I struggled to sing in the Sydney Town Hall as I couldn't tell if I was filling the room. This made things tricky as we were not allowed to sing in the space before the competition. I needed to not push to try and make bigger sounds. I adjusted and felt that I had a solid performance. I was so mesmerised by the venue's beauty I forgot which way on the stage I had to walk off! For the second round, I sang Romeo's aria, "Ah! Leve toi soleil!" from Gounod's Romeo et Juliette. I felt like there were no worries and really let this one go!

SYDNEY EISTEDDFOD OPERA ARIA SCHOLARSHIP

After the last competitor, we all attended a professionalism class with Pamela Andrews and Annette Browne while the adjudicators did their job. I could feel the performers' anxiety while waiting for the results. It took a while, even after the class was done. Of course, they had a hard decision to make!

The adjudicators came in, Jaqueline Dark and Stuart Maunder - Brian Castles-Onion couldn't attend as he was called for a last-minute rehearsal. They had very positive things to say about us all. With that said, they announced that I had made the finals! I had to stay in Sydney for another week! I was a finalist alongside Tom Nicholson (baritone), Sophie Salvesani (soprano), Andrew Williams (baritone) and Danita Weatherstone (soprano). We were all given feedback individually, and they told me that if I could open up the Bb in the Gounod, I would be sweet. Other than that, they thought anyone who sings "Dies bildnis" was crazy! They were happy with my performance!

The finals came around fast, and I was fortunate to sing with the Willoughby Symphony Orchestra for the final. In rehearsal with them, I struggled to find my sound as I felt a bit of water blocked in my ear. I had to trust the technique I learned over the last few years. Nicholas Milton, our conductor, was very lovely and accommodating.

On the day of the finals, I woke up quite relaxed. I had breakfast, did my morning workout, and warmed up in the hotel, everything I usually do before a sing. I arrived at the Sydney Town Hall, and we were running through our pieces, and again, I felt the water in my ear, so I marked through the rehearsal. Backstage, everyone was quiet. We were all getting into the zone. It was my first time wearing tails. It's usually only possible to find tails and suits my size if they're custom-made. I will be honest; I felt handsome and prince-like! Like a million bucks!

I called my family back home and sat through my Mum's words of encouragement. It was hilarious! But also hearing Mum's words isn't anything unusual. She told me the same things she had said since I was a kid. I was super grateful to talk to them; they kept me grounded, mocked me as any family would their own, and encouraged me to get out there and sing!

Because of the support I got from my family and the many messages on social media from all my friends and family worldwide, I felt very relaxed by the time I had to jump up and sing. I felt very comfortable with both songs, and it felt more like a performance than a competition. It all happened in a flash! Waiting patiently for the results, I called my family again and discussed how everything went. They felt I was in an excellent position to place. Ignoring them not to get my hopes up, I put my headphones on to ease my mind and pass the time before the results.



SYDNEY EISTEDDFOD OPERA ARIA SCHOLARSHIP

We all got called onto the stage and were greeted with vigorous applause from the audience. From there, Brian Castles-Onion spoke about not letting results determine success or failure. It was a solid message to us that we should always persevere and work hard because many singers who may not have won the Eisteddfod are most likely full-time freelance singers performing all over Europe. Jessica Pratt stepped in to adjudicate for Jacqueline Dark and also put her hand up, indicating that she didn't win any prize at this competition, and we all know how fantastic a career she has! It was very inspirational and reassuring for us all.

My heart was racing when they announced second prize was awarded to Sophie Salvesani, I felt goosebumps course all throughout my body, knowing there was a one in four chance of taking it out. As my name was announced as the winner, I instantly felt a rush of emotions. Lost for words, I looked in Katherine's direction before receiving the award. I was speechless the whole time as I held the trophy in disbelief. We celebrated and cried the entire night.

I couldn't have experienced this without your support. I am incredibly grateful to the Dame Malvina Major Foundation for their continued support. I cannot express enough how vital your help has been in helping set my journey to becoming a professional artist. I send my thanks and my heart to you all. I must also thank the Lockwood New Zealand Aria Competition for assisting me on my journey there, to Joanne LaGrouw and the team from The NZ Aria Trust. Thank you so much. I also want to thank the Te Pae Kokako - TANZOS programme for this trip to study under Opera Australia. Madeleine Pierard's guidance and professionalism helped me through the residency and the competition. The trip prepared me for this and I learned much about myself as an artist. I am incredibly grateful. I want to thank Paul and Carol Stigley for their continuous support and aid towards this competition.

I also want to extend my thanks to Dame Malvina, my teacher Nikki-Li Hartliep, David Harper, Madeleine Pierard, Hawa Focali, Anna Pierard and Jose Aparicio, Project Prima Volta, Pene Pati and Amina Edris, Simon O'Neill, Gary Griffiths, John Wilkie, Jon Hunter, Donald Trott and The New Zealand Opera School, David Mace, Sir William and Lady Judi Gallagher, Kristin Darragh, Phillip Rhodes, Amitai Pati, Francis Cowan, Ben Kubiak, Kathryn Young, Oliver Sewell, Ian Campbell, Sharolyn Kimmorley, Gleen Winslade, Su Choung, Fergus Byett and of course my wonderful Mum, my family in Hawkes Bay and the many friends that I have.

You have all been such positive influences in my life, and I am incredibly grateful to have met you all. You have made me a better artist and, more importantly, a better person. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I am less than twenty-four hours away from participating in the IFAC - Handa Australian Singing Competition Semi-finals, so that may be another report to let you in on. In the meantime, do take care!

Love to you all,
Emmanuel Fonoti-Fuimaono





Singing some Mozart!



Katherine and I with Stacey Alleaume who won the Lockwood NZ Aria in 2011, Sydney Eisteddfod in 2012



Pictured with the Sydney Eisteddfod Award



Finalists with adjudicators, conductor and Sydney Eisteddfod team



Shocked when my name was called out



Finalists pictured with Councillor Emelda Davis



Our cheeks were sore after the results