

# Te Pae Kōkako: The Aotearoa New Zealand Opera Studio



# MID-YEAR REPORT

2024



TE PAE KŌKAKO  
**TANZOS**  
THE AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND OPERA STUDIO

By

**JORDAN FONOTI-FUIMAONO, TENOR**

2024-25 TANZOS Resident Artist

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## JORDAN FONOTI-FUIMAONO

TENOR

*“Kia ora and Talofa lava, I am deeply blessed and humbled to be apart of this programme. How to describe what has happened in the past 6 months in a few pages is a challenge in itself because if I could, I would write an entire novel for you. Please join me as I take you through the past 6 months as well as what I am looking forward to being apart of soon. Enjoy...” – Jordan Fonoti-Fuimaono.*

Jordan Fonoti-Fuimaono (23) is a Samoan tenor from Flaxmere. He is a graduate of the University of Waikato and has gained his Bachelor of Music with Honours (First Class) and his Masters of Music in Advanced Performance Stream. He attended the New Zealand Opera School from 2021–2023 and was the recipient of the Dame Sister Mary Leo Scholarship in 2023. Operatic highlights for Jordan include Arlecchino (*I Pagliacci*, Festival Opera) and Normanno (*Lucia di Lammermoor*, Wellington Opera). Competition success includes winning the South Auckland Vocal Competition in 2021, runner-up in the DMMF Waikato Aria (2022) & the Norah Howell Hamilton Vocal Competition (2023). On top of that, he has been a finalist in the Lockwood New Zealand Aria, Wellington Aria & North Shore Aria Competitions.

# SUMMERTIME RECOVERY

## JANUARY-FEBRUARY

The **Summertime** of 2023 leading into 2024 was the toughest, yet most rewarding summer I have had. *Tough*, because of all the health problems I was dealing with at the time but *rewarding*, because it taught me so much about myself.

I had celebrated my acceptance into the TANZOS programme in the strangest way; incredibly happy, but also incredibly sick. In October 2023, I had an incident in a performance in Thames where I had to stop singing in the middle of a piece due to something that – at the time – I was totally unaware of. I was severely nauseous often, I had major problems with my breathing and my pharyngeal reflex would trigger itself just sitting or standing.

After this incident, I gave away all my engagements and moved back home to my mum in Hawkes Bay. Whilst there, I was able to do a lot of reflection, research and just simply – rest. I reflected on the year I had in 2023, which was a lot. I researched on what was going on with me and I rested by not doing any gigs, concerts. This also resulted in giving away my spot on the Class of '24 cohort at the New Zealand Opera School.

Even after recovering from the sickness of the time (or so I thought), I was still unable to sing without having feelings of the past. So with the advice of some really close family – I sought after sessions of counselling to talk things out. I learned about the underlying pressures I was facing, the high volume of work I was dealing with in 2023 as well as the time away from home was getting to me; all while not having a chance to reset myself, my routine or my singing technique.

After further advice from my (at the time) new singing teacher, Nikki Li. I booked an appointment to see an ENT (ear, nose and throat) specialist for one main reason; answers. I certainly learned a lot going to that appointment and every day was an improvement in one way or another with my health. I was able to improve on my physical health as well as my mental health and I was slowly feeling like myself again, ready for the year ahead. This would not have been possible without the support of loved ones and genuinely caring people in my life. I am indebted to these people.



# SETTLING INTO TANZOS

MARCH-APRIL

Our year began with a very fun and exciting **Orientation Week**, which allowed us to settle in and get used to what the year will have in store for us. A consultation lesson with our primary teacher Nikki Li Hartliep and a consultation with our primary coach, David Harper. Along with this, we had a few classes on Stagecraft, Expectations and also Resilience Training. We capped off the week with an event for the TANZOS donors where each of us presented an aria. I sang 'En fermant les yeux' from Massenet's opera *Manon*. A favourite of mine at the moment.

We had the pleasure of receiving coaching's and lessons from our first international tutors; mezzo-soprano **Caitlin Hulcup** and pianist/coach **Carrie Dowdle**, who is also the Head of Opera at the Verbier Festival Stelier Lyrique in Switzerland. In Caitlin's sessions, I learned about the importance of the body - all the different parts of your back and legs that will allow you to be free, but grounded. This was valuable to me as she is someone still currently in the industry still singing in big houses, as well as teaching in tertiary herself in Berlin. Carrie gave me ideas on memorising passages and identifying an emotional shift in a piece. To this day, Carrie reaches out on updates on my development as well as updates on my health.

As the weeks went on, we began to settle into our sessions with Nikki Li and David (every two week) perfectly. Along with this, our stagecraft, fitness, yoga, german language and resilience training classes quickly become full-on in the best way. I quickly became fit in my singing and in the way I handled a full day of attending classes. By the middle of April, it was time for our full cohort to present publicly for the first time. We presented a 60 minute recital as part of the Wednesday Lunchtime Concert Series at the University of Waikato Conservatorium of Music. It was indeed a fun and successful concert. I sang 'En fermant les yeux' and also sang a duet with my fellow DMMF Opera Grant recipient; soprano, Jasmine Jessen. We sang 'Tornamia dir che m'ami' from Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*. It was safe to say that I felt like I had **settled in**.

The remainder of April was quiet in terms of public performances - but certainly not in preparation for various different things. I had begun chorus rehearsals for NZ Opera's production of *Le Comte Ory* and amongst that, preparing for my Masters of Music recital exam that was extended due to sickness and my first solo recital as part of my TANZOS assessments. The months ahead was about to be full on.



# RECITAL SEASON

## MAY-JUNE

I had always found that **Recitals** were my biggest challenge as a singer. To be able to sing for a long period of time, interchange between languages whilst also interchanging between drastically different genres. On top of that – delivering each individual piece with care and precision and with the useful isolated technical work you had mapped out throughout the learning process.

**First Recital** of the year: Before I could solely put my focus on the TANZOS assessment, I had spent most of March and April preparing my recital from 2023's Masters of Music when I was still under the tutelage of the Music Department's HOD; Kristin Darragh. This recital was supposed to take place in February but due to my sickness over the summer, I had to extend. Madeleine, TANZOS and especially my new teacher Nikki Li, were super supportive in helping me prepare for this recital despite it not being any of their problem. So, on the 2nd May, I completed a 80-minute recital consisting of operatic numbers by Handel, Donizetti and Massenet and song by Hahn, Strauss, Tosti and modern American composer; Ben Moore. With that Masters, I proudly finished with Distinction (90% and over). (Photo from recital – bottom left)

**Second Recital:** Pretty much immediately after that first recital, Nikki Li and I decided to immediately go into planning out the next 45 minute recital for my first solo recital with TANZOS. I felt like a new person and our plan was to showcase it in this recital – a culmination of what the last 3 months of consistent lessons looks and sounds like. What I loved about this recital is that it was all the things that I enjoyed singing but also things that showed me off in my new-found technique and most of all, challenged me in the right way. I sang operatic pieces and even scenes by Handel, Bizet and Donizetti and songs by Schumann, Tosti and Quilter. To end this recital, I decided to sing and siva Samoa (dance) to one of my favourite traditional Samoan songs growing up; 'Le la ua goto I Salafai' (pictured bottom right)

All while preparing for these recitals, I had the pleasure of being apart of other **external engagements** such as performing the tenor soloist in Haydn's Teresa Mass in B minor and NZ Opera's production of *Le Comte Ory* (pictured bottom middle)



# HOPPING ON A PLANE

JULY

The idea of leaving to go to the National Opera Company in Australia for two weeks to observe, learn and be immersed in their culture was nothing short of a 'pinch me' moment. With my CV, repertoire list and passport checked off the travel list – I was ready to set off for what would be my first ever International trip and my first time out of New Zealand, ever.

The team at Opera Australia were warm and welcoming – their energy was infectious and we almost instantly felt at home there. The Young Artist Programme Producer Jane Hennessy was especially amazing in her work, collaborating with the TANZOS Director Madeleine, to organise the epic things we got to do and experience.

I received individual coaching's from **Brian Castles-Onion**, **Donna Balson** and **Jonathan Wilson**. In these coaching's, I learned a lot about being musical and making the pieces MY OWN (within reason). We as a cohort had 1) a group class with language coach, **Nicole Dorigo** 2) a movement workshop with movement co-ordinator and director, **Denni Sayers** and 3) a workshop and masterclass with stage director **Constantine Costi**. These classes provided me with a lot to think about. In Nicole's class, I learned about the best and most optimal way to treat sung double consonants in Italian and how to achieve what the language wants, while maintaining freedom in my vocal technique. With Denni, I learned that your scapula, shoulders and knees are just as much of a vital part of a flexible body than the rest – it is often not thought about and I certainly never thought about until then. Then Constantine gave us an insight on how, despite jumping straight into an aria, that your imagination is your best friend and it will keep you engaged in your singing as well as in your character.

Along with the many practical elements of the residency, we got to observe various rehearsals for Brett Dean's *Hamlet*, and some of Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, as well as sit in the General Dress rehearsal of Puccini's *Il Trittico* and then pit&perch Puccini's *Tosca*. We also watched ticketed performances of *Tosca* and *Il Trittico*. This to me was by far the most valuable part. I got to see how established professionals handle themselves in all sorts of situations and pressures and to see how well they did was truly inspiring.

The residency was the best two weeks to date. To have been in that position was a blessing

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# WHAT'S NEXT

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**AUG 9**  
TANZOS-AOS  
Gala Concert  
ARTIST

**2024**

**AUG 10**  
NZO-APO  
Tristan Und Isolde  
Role: CHORUS

**SEP 8**  
Roderick Williams  
Masterclass  
SOLOIST

**SEP 27**  
Festival Opera NZ  
Gala Dinner  
SOLOIST

**OCT 31**  
NZ Aria  
Competition  
COMPETITOR

**NOV 21**  
2nd Solo Recital  
TANZOS  
ARTIST

**NOV 23**  
End of Year  
Gala Concert  
ARTIST

**2025**

**JAN 5**  
NZ Opera School  
Whanganui  
STUDENT

**JAN 27**  
Turandot  
Festival Opera NZ  
Role: PANG

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**University of Waikato**

**Nikki Li Hartliep** – Primary Singing Teacher  
**David Harper** – Primary Coach  
**Francis Cowan** – Chief of Collaborative Piano  
**Kristin Darragh** – HOD Conservatorium of Music

**Madeleine Pierard** – TANZOS Director/DMMF Chair in Opera  
**Lauren Marshall** – Programme Co-ordinator

## Fellow TANZOS Artists:

**Jasmine Jessen**, soprano, **Samuel McKeever**, baritone, **Ridge Ponini**, tenor  
**Taylor Wallbank**, tenor (Associate Artist), **Katherine Winitana**, soprano (Associate Artist)

**Jane Hennessy** – Opera Australia Young Artist Programme Producer  
**Rhiannon Cooper** – TANZOS alumna/Director's Assistant (Sydney Residency)

**Amanda Matson** – Guidance Counsellor  
**Alofa Fonoti (mum)**, **Siblings & Family**  
**EFKS Hastings Church Family**  
**Bentley Family**

