

## Opera Australia Residency

Our hosts at Opera Australia were very welcoming and excited to have us. We watched hours of the on-stage production rehearsals for *Aida* where we got to see the work brew. I was astounded because I'd never seen a production of its scale before. It was awesome to hear such classy singers fill the theatre with beautiful and expressive sounds but it was particularly interesting to see how the production progressively improved as the conductor, director and artists worked together to pin-point the story's portrayal in a most captivating manner.

We had sessions on 'vocal care' which I found very interesting. These sessions were focussed on the anatomical function of the muscles, bones and nerves that are heavily involved with singing. I found this especially useful because I now have a mental image of what's going on in my body when navigating the tricky parts of my instrument. We also enjoyed a session on "stage movement" which covered the importance of moving around the stage in a safe and manageable way without disturbing the vocal aspect of storytelling.

Another highlight for me was the "Pit and Perch" experience. I had the opportunity to observe a performance of *Rigoletto* from the orchestral pit (first half) and from a balcony-like stand above the stage (second half). The conductor for this particular performance stood on the conductor's stand with only a baton and no music score. He mouthed every single word and didn't miss a cue. As the orchestra responded to his expressions I found myself on a rollercoaster ride of emotions and felt very inspired. His demonstration of dedication to the music, competence, and passion showed me just how deeply a story can be portrayed through music alone. I was also made aware of certain facial expressions to avoid seeing from the conductor.

The most exciting and informative part of the trip for me were the multiple music coaching sessions. These sessions were with Opera Australia's conductor, Brian Castles-Onions, Michael Black from Chicago Lyric Opera, Stuart Stratford and Fiona MacSherry from Scottish Opera, Donna Balson from Opera Australia and Glenn Winlade. Each of these individuals work in positions capable of offering work in the future and possess a great knowledge for our craft, so each session was like an unofficial audition. It's very important to get different perspectives from as many experts as possible and when it comes from people like the those we worked with, the mastering of such a complex technique becomes closer within grasp.

When I was first introduced to opera as a teenager, the first thought that came to mind was "Ah the Sydney Opera House". At that time, I never would've thought I'd sing on the main stage. Much like our time with Simon Keenlyside, it's taking a while to come down from what was the most joyful and eye-opening experience I've had yet. I'm very blessed and grateful that on my first day outside of New Zealand, I had the opportunity to do what I'm most passionate about. Every day was filled with opportunities to learn and to have fun doing it - I would do it all over again and again without change. Putting together a plan for the next couple of years to further my development has been difficult because it always feels like there's more to learn here before leaving, but after many discussions and eye-opening experiences in Sydney, I feel confident and excited head out into the world and work towards performing for and inspiring audiences across the globe. I'm grateful to all those involved in making this happen for my colleagues and I. Of my

26 years, the ten days in Sydney were my favourite days to be alive. It's difficult to accurately describe how I feel about it all as it's deeper than what words can achieve. I'm excited for what lies ahead and am very proud to know that I will always be a part of TANZOS and what this programme is doing for aspiring artists.

Alfred Fonoti-Fuimaono