



newsapril2008

HÉLÈNE

Melba CEO, Maria Vandamme, has seen her dream of recording Camille Saint-Saëns' 'Hélène' realised at last.

Ever since Maria discovered the long forgotten score of **Hélène** in the archives of the Monte Carlo Opera in 1999 she has been determined to produce the world's first recording of this Poème Lyrique that was written for Nellie Melba.

The one-acter, **Hélène**, which Saint-Saëns denoted "poème lyrique", and to which he furnished his own libretto, dealt with the story of Helen of Troy. Saint-Saëns was one of the many critics of Offenbach's operetta, **La belle Hélène**, who disliked its trivial treatment of antiquity. Saint-Saëns wished to portray the relationship between Helen and Paris with due seriousness, as a paean to the passion of love.

Saint-Saëns wrote the title part for the legendary Australian soprano Nellie Melba, then a major star of the Monte Carlo Opera House. She sang **Hélène** at the opera's world premiere, on 18 February 1904 [in a double bill with Massenet's one-act **La Navarraise**], under the baton of Saint-Saëns himself. The same year he conducted the productions at Covent Garden in London in May, in Milan in November and subsequently, on 18 January 1905, at the Opéra-Comique in Paris. Then the opera fell into oblivion.

Maria Vandamme found the score of **Hélène** while searching for documentary material on Dame Nellie Melba in the archives of the Monte Carlo Opera. Maria says: "I was excited to come across the score and was immediately struck by the extraordinary opportunity a recording of **Hélène** offered for Australian music. This is an important work and we at Melba are thrilled to be returning it to the catalogue."

In October a cast of superb singers, together with Orchestra Victoria and a specially created chorus of Melbourne singers, the Belle Époque, began recording under the brilliant direction of French conductor Guillaume Tourniaire. The historic recording is now in the final phase of manufacturing and will be released internationally in June .

There are two SACD discs in the set, with the second carrying another world premiere recording, Saint-Saëns' **Nuit Persane**, a cycle of "Persian" songs for two singers, narrator and chorus.

Saint-Saëns wrote over 120 songs, mostly grouped in cycles, including the series of **Mémoires Persanes**, Op. 26 composed between 1870 and 1871 to the text of Armand Renaud. Its exotic melodies were warmly received,

Continued on page 3



Australian Government



Melba is supported by the Australian Government, through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

OUT & ABOUT WITH MELBA

MELBA ARTIST WINS PRIX LAURITZ MELCHIOR

GLOBAL RECOGNITION OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF MELBA continues with the award of the prestigious Prix Lauritz Melchior* to tenor **Stuart Skelton** for his internationally acclaimed contribution to **Die Walküre**, the first instalment of Wagner's epic *Ring Cycle* in state-of-the-art Super Audio sound.

Critics from around the world have been unanimous in their acclaim for Stuart Skelton's performance as Siegmund in Melba's recording of the State Opera of South Australia's multi-award-winning production of the *Ring Cycle*.

"Steely of tone, and impressively elastic in his range, Skelton is the most promising young Wagnerian to emerge from Australia since [Lisa] Gasteen." *Bloomberg [USA]*

"Stuart Skelton's Siegmund is a major find... a fully fledged dramatic tenor with tremendous power and expressiveness and also capable of much sensitive lyrical singing... beautiful, manly and steady."

MusicWeb International [UK]

"Stuart Skelton shows himself as a Siegmund full of promise, with a large, flexible voice and a truly heroic stature."

Frankfurter Allgemeine [Germany]

"Stuart Skelton is, quite simply, one of the best Siegmunds on disc."

The Age [Australia]



Stuart Skelton [Siegmund] and Deborah Riedel [Sieglinde] at the Melba reception, Government House, Sydney

*Named after the legendary Danish-American tenor, the Prix Lauritz Melchior is awarded by the Académie du disque lyrique in France in recognition of the year's most outstanding Wagnerian tenor in a recording.

AND ANOTHER PRIZE FOR MELBA

The Australian Business Arts Foundation recognises Melba's support for young artists

THE AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS ARTS FOUNDATION PROMOTES private sector financial support for the arts, and in its current program has presented its **Giving Award [Victoria]** to Melba. The award is in recognition of our series of recordings with exceptional young artists, made possible with a \$100,000 grant from the Ian Potter Foundation.

The Potter grant is being used for recording, distributing and promoting the work of our best young musicians here and in Europe, North America and Japan. The artists will perform at launch events in the different markets and, through recording and appearances, we hope they will be launched onto the concert stages of the world.



Jane Haley, CEO of AbaF, presents the Giving Award to Melba CEO, Maria Vandamme

Terry Campbell AO, the chairman of AbaF, says: "Our programs and services are carefully targeted and proven effective. They are greatly valued by business and deliver tangible benefits to the arts, in particular the small and medium sector and, increasingly, individual artists."

THE NG TWINS TAKE BROADWAY

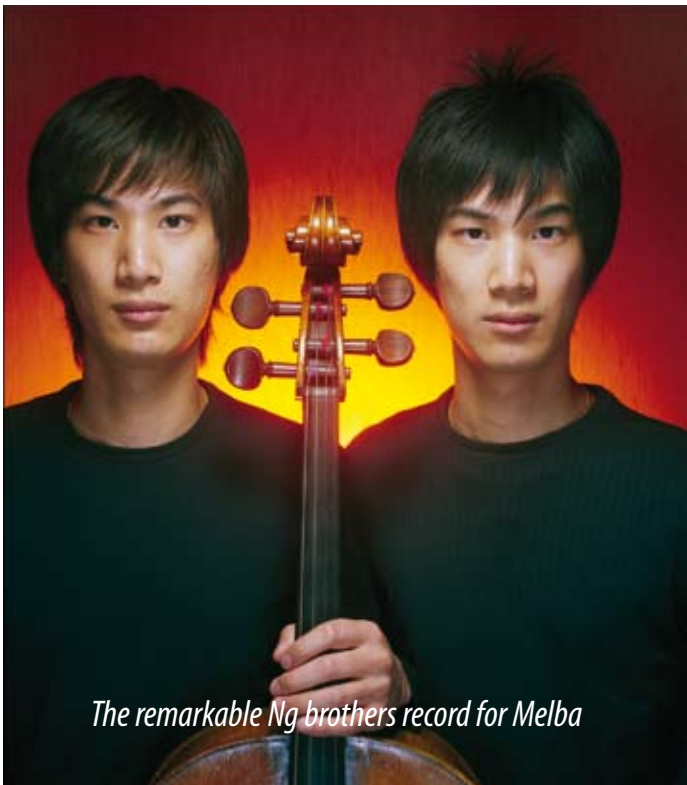
MELBA ARRANGED FOR **PEI-SIAN AND PEI-JEE NG**, the talented twin cellists, to perform at the Australia Day concert in New York this year. The concert, 'Australia Plays Broadway', was held at Jazz, in the Lincoln Centre as part of the 'G'Day USA' events.

One of the organisers emailed Maria to say: "Thank you so much for all your assistance with the Ng boys. For me they were the highlight of the concert in New York. They played the Elena Kats-Chernin piece with brilliance and passion and the audience adored them... I am also most appreciative of your help in this matter. You made it very easy and your judgement about the music was absolutely spot on.

"I am in your debt."

[Read more about the twins on the following page]

TWINS—JOINED AT THE CELLO!



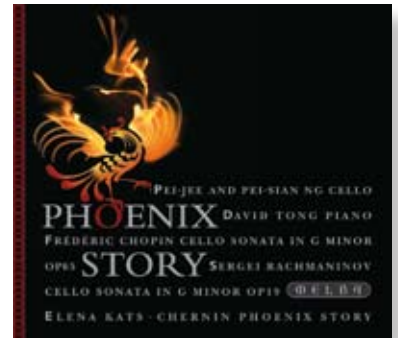
The remarkable Ng brothers record for Melba

PEI-SIAN AND PEI-JEE NG are twenty-four year old twins who are both outstanding cello virtuosi. Born in Sydney they then studied in Adelaide. They are currently studying at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester.

Pei-Sian was Commonwealth Musician of the Year in 2007 and winner of the Gold Medal and first prize at the Royal Overseas League Music competition in London. Pei-Jee was Symphony Australia Young Performer of the Year in 2001. He has since been supported by a number of awards from trusts and foundations here and abroad.

The Ng twins were the outstanding performers at the Australia Day celebrations in New York this year and have been invited back for future events showcasing Australian talent.

Their first recording for Melba, *Phoenix Story*, which they are making with pianist David Tong, contains music by Chopin, Rachmaninov and Elena Kats-Chernin.



Phoenix Story is scheduled for release in June

HÉLÈNE [CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1]



Maestro Guillaume Tourniaire

and in 1891 the composer revised the work in a version for two soloists, narrator, choir and orchestra; he changed the original order of the melodies, added new ones and renamed the cycle **Nuit Persane**. While the original version, **Mémoires Persanes**, has survived, and been recorded by a baritone and pianist, the vocal-orchestral score of **Nuit Persane** followed the tracks of **Hélène** into oblivion.

Melba's is the first recording in the form the composer intended, with orchestral

accompaniment. Steve Davislim, Zan McKendree-Wright and the Belle Époque chorus, with narrator Amanda Mouellic perform with Orchestra Victoria, under the baton of Guillaume Tourniaire.

The recording of these two important works was made possible with a generous grant from the Victorian Government, through Arts Victoria. Minister for the Arts, Ms Lynne Kosky, said: "The Victorian Government is committed to supporting excellence in music and we are proud to support this important international project."

The recording features soprano Rosamund Illing as Hélène, tenor Steve Davislim as Pàris, alto Zan McKendree-Wright as Pallas and soprano Leanne Kenneally as Venus.

The conductor, Guillaume Tourniaire (above), was so excited by the discovery of the long lost work that he programmed it in the first season of his new post

as music director of the State Opera Prague. **Hélène** was performed on stage in Prague in February, with due tribute in the program notes to Maria Vandamme for her contribution to this musical milestone. Other opera houses and concert organisations are already discussing performances.

Maria says: "It is vital for an independent Australian record company to find the gaps in the recorded repertoire and to fill them with performances by the best talent this country has to offer. Something as startlingly new and unknown as these Saint-Saëns masterpieces makes audiences sit up and take notice – and focuses international attention on Orchestra Victoria and our singers. **Hélène** has turned out to be all that I had hoped for, thanks to the exceptional talent of all involved."



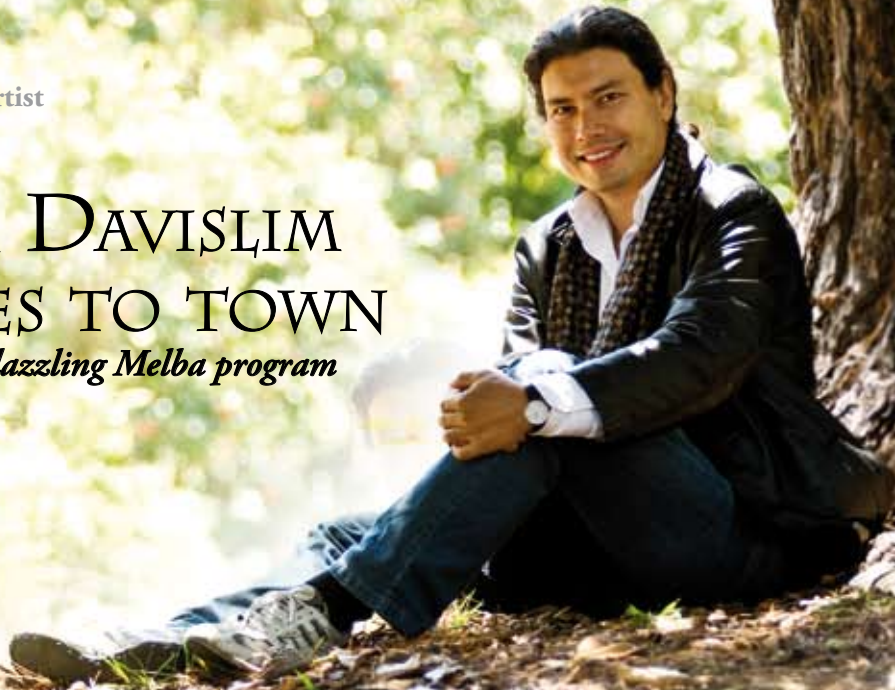
*L to R:
Zan McKendree-Wright
Leanne Kenneally
Rosamund Illing*

*The SACD of **Hélène** and **Nuit Persane**
will be released in June*

Melba featured artist

MR DAVISLIM COMES TO TOWN

with a dazzling Melba program



Tenor Steve Davislim, once a Melbourne boy, is making a name for himself in the opera houses and concert halls of Europe these days. However, in October he came back for a short time to give a concert and make two important recordings for Melba.

Steve was back to keep an appointment to record Schubert's **Winterreise**, with pianist Anthony Romaniuk. And what better way to tune up than to give a recital of the work just before the recording sessions.

Melba Hall in Melbourne was packed for the recital, and Age critic John Slavin wrote of Steve: "This is an actor singer of thrilling intensity and musical beauty. The sensitive accompaniment by Anthony Romaniuk didn't steal his thunder."



Anthony Romaniuk

The Schubert program began with a performance of the **Rosamunde** quartet by what Slavin called "the hottest ensemble in town", the **TinAlley String Quartet** — also Melba artists currently working on recordings. TinAlley String Quartet was fresh from its triumph at the Banff International String Quartet Competition, where their "light and luminous sound, applied with originality all week from Webern to Mendelssohn and early Beethoven garnered first prize for the Australian foursome." [Gramophone, November 2007]

Along with the Schubert, Steve was also here recording the role of Paris in Camille Saint-Saëns' **Hélène** [see page one] and the solo tenor part in the same composer's **Nuit Persane**.

Altogether Steve is scheduled to make five recordings with Melba, to add to his highly praised set of Richard Strauss songs, **Seduction**, recorded with Simone Young and Orchestra Victoria.

He studied with Dame Joan Hammond and is a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts, where he began his training as a horn player. After attending the Opernstudio in Zurich he became an ensemble member of Zurich Opera, performing with Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Franz Welser-Möst.

These days he lives in Europe and performs with opera companies and orchestras in Zurich, London, Hamburg, Helsinki, Chicago, San Francisco, Barcelona, Madrid, Paris, Milan, Vienna — the list of important venues and roles goes on.

Gramophone's Alan Blyth, writing of Steve's performance in **Seduction**, says: "Davislim is worth being spoken of in the same breath as his notable predecessors of similar voice — Peter Anders and Fritz Wunderlich — and praise can hardly be higher than that."

If I had to pick one performance from this Mozart Year to cherish, it would be that of Australian tenor Steve Davislim as Idomeneo at Milan's Teatro alla Scala. After conquering the superhuman demands of the coloratura aria 'Fuor del mar', Davislim sang the tortured father-king's prayer 'Accogli, oh re del mar' so heavenly, it reminded me of an incident several years ago... At the end of George Balanchine's Concerto Barocco at New York City Ballet, the little old lady sitting in front of me turned around, caught my eye and said, 'It's almost enough to make you believe in God.'
St Petersburg Times [Russia]



RECENT & FUTURE RELEASES FOR 2008

Out now: Gothic Toccata [PD 70001] – Calvin Bowman makes thunder on the Melbourne Town Hall organ, including world premiere recordings of music by Australian composers past and present.



May: Through a Glass Darkly: Roger Smalley Chamber Works [MR 301111] by composer and pianist Smalley, performed by the Australian String Quartet with the composer at the piano, hornist Darryl Poulsen and violinist Paul Wright.

June: Strauss: Seduction [MR 301108] – our highly acclaimed disc of Strauss songs and orchestral music with Steve Davislim, Simone Young and Orchestra Victoria is remastered for SACD surround sound.

June: The Floral Dance and other Peter Dawson Favourites [MR 301109] with Gregory Yurisich and the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra conducted by David Lloyd-Jones gets the SACD treatment.



MELBA ARTISTS

- 1 Kristian Winther & Anthony Romaniuk
- 2 Lin Jiang
- 3 Deborah Riedel
- 4 Barry Tuckwell AC OBE

June: Phoenix Story [MR 301113] Pei-Jee and Pei-Sian Ng, with David Tong on the piano, perform cello works by Chopin, Rachmaninov and Elena Kats-Chernin. *See the story on page three.*

June: Saint-Saëns: Hélène | Nuit Persane [MR 301114-2] [world premiere recording] *See the story on page one.*

October: Tzigane: Violin Music by Maurice Ravel [MR 301115] Violinist Kristian Winther, cellist Michelle Wood and pianist Anthony Romaniuk perform the music of Ravel.



July: Encore, My Good Sir – Virtuoso Works for Horn and Piano [MR 301116] Lin Jiang, horn, and Benjamin Martin, piano, play music from yesterday [Bach and Schumann] and today [Maxwell Davies, Salonen] and in between [Poulenc and Hindemith].



August: Cherry Ripe: Unearthed vocal treasures from the 18th and 19th Centuries [MR 301118] bringing together Deborah Riedel and Richard Bonyngé for another collection of rarities.



October: Rhapsodie and other works for Horn and Orchestra [MR 301117] Sydney Symphony horn player, Ben Jacks, performs Australian and French works for horn and orchestra with Orchestra Victoria and The Queensland Orchestra conducted by Barry Tuckwell. Among its world premiere recordings is Jean-Michel Damase's *Rhapsodie*, commissioned by Barry Humphries AO OBE, one of Melba's Artistic Benefactors.



October: Schubert: Winterreise [MR 301119] Steve Davislim and Anthony Romaniuk enter the hotly contested Schubert field with a new recording of a much loved work.

THE CYCLE IS COMPLETE

THE GREAT WAGNER PROJECT HAS REACHED ITS FINAL INSTALLMENT...

Late in 2007 Melba released the four disc Super Audio surround sound recording of *Götterdämmerung*, the last part of the set from the 2004 production of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* by The State Opera of South Australia.

And still the accolades come from critics all over the world for the singers, the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and the conducting of Asher Fisch.

Music Web International says: "This reading is a tour de force..."

Of the four *Götterdämmerung* from the 21st century that have come my way... Asher Fisch and his Adelaide forces definitely carry off the palm."

New Classics [UK] says the recording "captures all the excitement and energy of the acclaimed State Opera of South Australia production in studio-perfect sound."

SA-CD.net praises "the perfect sound stage".

Classics Today [USA] gives 10/10 for sound quality and singles out the "sumptuous orchestral playing".

The Australian, in the roundup of best classical CDs of 2007, says:

"...the complete set is a formidable artistic document. Lisa Gasteen is radiant. The orchestral playing under conductor Asher Fisch is thrilling and the sound is superb."

The *Ring* recordings have been honoured with awards and commendations from critical publications and organisations in Australia, Europe and the USA.

Das Rheingold [MR 301089-90]
Australian Recording Industry Association
Nominee for "Best Classical Album 2007"
Opus High Definition (Audiophile) [France]
"Opus d'or award"

Die Walküre [MR 301091-94]
Académie du disque lyrique [France]
"2007 Prix Lauritz Melchior"

Les APB [Belgium]
"CD of the Month"

Fanfare [USA]
"Want List 2006"

Positive Feedback Online (Audiophile) [USA]
"Writer's Choice Awards 2006"

ABC Classic FM [Australia]
"Listener's Choice Award 2006"

Siegfried [MR 301095-98]
BBC Music Magazine [UK]
"Opera Music Choice"
Classic FM Magazine [UK]
"Opera and Vocal Disc of the Month"

Götterdämmerung [MR 301099-102]
Classic FM Magazine [UK]
"Opera and Vocal Disc of the Month"
Positive Feedback Online (Audiophile) [USA]
"Writer's Choice Awards 2007"

6

Sensationally recorded, the best-sounding Cycle on the market to date, bar none—Gramophone Awards Special 2007

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Lady Primrose Potter with Richard Bonyngé and Gough Whitlam

FOUNDING CHAIR OF THE MELBA FOUNDATION, **Lady Primrose Potter, AC** has stood down from her position after four years of service. The Foundation owes Lady Potter a huge debt of gratitude for her inspiration and guidance during its formative years. Her broad knowledge of the arts and not-for-profit organisations has been invaluable. Lady Potter has been a wonderful advocate for Melba's mission and made a major contribution to our early success. Lady Potter joins Richard Bonyngé and Dame Joan Sutherland as a distinguished Founding Patron of the Melba Foundation.

The new chairman, **Dr Douglas G Mitchell**, has served as a Director of the Melba Board since 2003, and is the Presenting Sponsor of the Melba Ring.

There is an urgent need for a body of recordings from Australia that preserves and celebrates the achievement of our finest musicians... Recordings make our music accessible to all Australians, no matter where they live; they promote artists on the widest international platform and give them the recognition they deserve.

Dame Joan Sutherland