

Rising star

ALEXANDRA FLOOD SOPRANO

From growing up in the United Arab Emirates to being thrown in the deep end at the Salzburg Festival, this young singer tells us what it takes to make it in the opera world

Did you have a musical childhood?

My early childhood was spent on Phillip Island, singing in community pantomimes and local talent shows. Mine wasn't a particularly instrumental family, but there was always music playing in the house. In 1999 my family moved to the inland town of Al Ain in the United Arab Emirates. By an incredible stroke of luck, there lived in this small desert oasis a retired German opera singer. I started lessons and by 11 was tackling Feldenkrais and Alexander techniques. She also introduced me to Mozart, and eventually opera.

As a young singer, who were your vocal inspirations from among the greats?

My two strongest female influences were Alanis Morissette and Aretha Franklin. The raw expressiveness of *You Oughta Know* and *Chain of Fools* resonated with me and I try to bring that kind of honesty and humanity to my performances. As my classical tastes refined, I listened to Inese Galante, Cecilia Bartoli and Pavarotti. I still get nostalgic when I hear that early recording of *La Donna è Mobile*.

You've won a fair few competitions and prizes. Which have meant the most to you and where have they lead?

Sentimentally, the award that means the most to me remains the Opera Scholars Australia 'Scholar of the Year' in 2011. After five years coming up the ranks of that programme, winning that title was a special moment for me. Another significant win was the Opera Foundation Australia AIMS award. This prize was my ticket to the big time in Europe. The AIMS award also put me in Austria at the time of the Salzburg Festival audition.

How exciting was being a young artist at last year's Salzburg Festival?

Talk about being thrown in the deep end! I had basically no professional experience and suddenly I was engaged with one of the most prestigious festivals in the world. I was asked to jump in for Clorinda in *La Cenerentola*

and to cover Konstanze. Two roles quickly grew to four, plus concerts and events, including a whirlwind trip to Spain to sing at the private castle of a festival sponsor. I sang under the batons of Franz Welser-Möst and emerging French conductor Maxime Pascal. I went from zero experience to having four roles under my belt, a plethora of new arias and songs, and being able to say that the first 'pro' orchestra with which I sang was the Vienna Philharmonic.

How valuable do you think it is for a young Australian artist to get experience overseas?

People ask me this a lot and my response is this: it depends on your goals. There is fantastic training available in Australia and it is possible, although difficult, to have an almost full-time career there. However, if you want to have any kind of international career, learning how the industry works overseas – and making contacts – is essential. I split my time between Europe and the USA, and I have developed a detailed and nuanced understanding of both those industries, enabling me to make strategic decisions about career steps. Experience is everything and, as in any industry, knowledge is power.

What are your plans and what might you have your eye on in the next few years?

My immediate plan is to finish eating this NY diner waffle and get back to my apartment so I can prepare for a big masterclass in Manhattan tomorrow... In a mid- to longer-term sense, whilst I do engage in the normal cattle-call audition tours and competitions, I'm very interested in how the opera industry needs to and is changing. I



BORN COWES, PHILLIP ISLAND, AUSTRALIA

STUDIED BACHELOR OF ARTS (UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE), MASTER OF OPERA (BAYERISCHE THEATERAKADEMIE AUGUST EVERDING/HOCHSCHULE FÜR MUSIK UND THEATER MUNICH)

LIKES WAFFLES, RICHARD STRAUSS, PRADA

DISLIKES SLOW INTERNET CONNECTIONS, HUMIDITY

would like to be leading that change instead of following it. Watch this space.

Who might be on your 'wish list' of conductors to work with or other singers you'd like to play opposite?

In terms of dream colleagues, I have to say that the people with whom I am most excited to work are my mates – the brilliant young singers who I know personally across the globe. There are some really exciting voices developing in my generation and I am looking forward to sharing global stages with my friends. Particularly baritones.

Alexandra Flood appears at the Bangalow Music Festival from August 14-16