

I have to say I'm overwhelmed, to say the least. And this comes from a boy who's never won a raffle. So, to say that I'm chuffed is an understatement. I am very, very honoured to be receiving the MOST Achievement Award (MAA). Not only because the past recipients of this award are an August group, and I look forward to joining the ranks as a junior member, but also because this comes from a foundation whose sole aim is to help young singers forge careers.

I started directing the year before the Mathy Awards was first presented, and I look back over the list of finalists and winners and I have to say that in my 40 years of directing, I don't think there's ever been a show where I haven't directed at least one finalist or winner of the Mathy. Today I'm in Adelaide directing Paul O'Neill as Macduff in Verdi's Macbeth.

Earlier in the year I directed Jake Bigwood too in Carmen for West Australian Opera. Jeremy Kleeman was here in the Gilbert and Sullivan Festival; it goes on and on. I'm pleased to announce that in my first year at Victorian Opera we'll be showcasing Kendra Howarth and Kang Wang in a little-known Puccini opera.

All of these singers have studied and have consequently forged careers overseas, and there are many people, of course, who bemoan the fact that Australians have to go overseas in order to start their careers, but I'm afraid 'twas ever thus. We just simply have too small of a population base to be able to allow many people to come here and have a full time career in opera.

It's a very different time from when I joined Opera Australia or the Australian Opera, as it was called then in 1978. Then we had 36 singers that were on full time salary with Opera Australia, and at any night of the week you could put on a 'Bohème' or a 'Traviata' or a 'Figaro' and probably cast it three times over.

I was also lucky enough to be able to forge a career in opera here. Those days have gone and for many reasons, mainly economic I suppose, but there are still many opportunities here for some singers. But most will have to go overseas. And that's, of course, where MOST comes into operation, allowing kids the chance to go over, to hone their craft, to strut their stuff, to start their careers.

That's the first part of the equation. The second part of the equation is where people like me come in. Our job is to give these young Australians the chance to perform in Australia for their home audiences. And I think it behoves any company now if they've got a chance or a choice to showcase Australians, they must do it.

We're very, very lucky to have people like MOST providing the funding for young kids to go overseas and study. It's up to us now to bring those young kids back to showcase what they can do for their home audiences. For me, I'm completely honoured to be given this award and I look forward to many, many opportunities to showcase many, many more winners and finalists in the Mathy Awards.

Thank you very much for the honour.