

## Appendices Introduction

### *The Portrait* – A Memoir of Development of My Music Theatre Work

My candidature for the Master of Music was centred on my desire to integrate my skills as a generalist composer with my first degree, an Honours in drama, in order to create a music theatre work. I understood that the degree would offer me skills, support and the focus to make such a project feasible. Writing a full-length theatre piece is an enormous project. I have gained a new confidence in going through the many processes, from conception and development of lyrics and music through to orchestration of a chamber opera. The learning intensified as the touring opera company, Co-Opera offered the equivalent of a professional opera composer apprenticeship to workshop, then develop and present *The Portrait* in several performances in South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and the ACT.

One of the significant things I have learned is that as a composer, there is significant advantage in being able to write my own libretto, working with words in a way that when I get to the writing stage, the seed for the music is already inside me. This is less the exact melody, harmony or rhythmic structure and more akin to an inner ‘sculpture’ of its shape and its purpose. As I had dual librettist and composer roles, I felt free to alter any lyrics that did not flow with the emerging music, not having to consult with another person at each decision making point. As the whole concept was integrated within me, this meant the composition of *The Portrait* was done in three months once I began composing.

Table 1 below chronicles the major stages of the past four years which led to the creation of the libretto, score and orchestration of *The Portrait* and the fourteen professional performances it has already received.

<b>Timeline of Development</b>	<b>Activities and Stages - <i>The Portrait</i></b>
January 2003 – April 2003	Commission and research, early ideas
May 2003 – September 2003	Shaping the form & themes, first draft of libretto, consultation & refinement
October 2003 – August 2004	Compassionate and bereavement leave
September 2004 – January 2005	Recommencing the project, field research and development of first music
February 2005 – May 2005	Writing the piano score and meeting Director of Co-Opera
June 2005 – July 2005	First development workshop and three staged performances with evaluation
August 2005 – December 2005	Refinement from evaluation and preparation for professional season at The Space, Adelaide Festival Theatre
January 2006- February 2006	Creation of technical and marketing resources and performances at The Space, Adelaide Festival Theatre
June 2006 – July 2006	Orchestration of score and creation of parts for chamber ensemble version
August 2006 – September 2006	Creation of touring show and seven interstate performances
January 2007 – May 2007	Further refinement of score for submission

Table 1: Schedule of *The Portrait* Development Stages

A few months into my candidature, while I was experimenting with ideas for a music theatre work, I was approached by Brian Chatterton, General Manager, Co-Opera to write an opera on the life of Stella Bowen. Bowen was a North Adelaide born artist who had lived overseas and later became an official Australian war artist in World War II. Chatterton had reviewed tapes and CDs of my compositions held at the Australian Music Centre and felt my aesthetic was the one that could tell her story. He showed me *Stravinsky's Lunch* by Drusilla Modjeska (1999) a best-seller that had brought Stella's story to a wide audience. I had read all Modjeska's other books but had steered clear of this book, feeling it was too close to my own life situation: a woman artist whose brilliant and dependent husband made it difficult for her to get time for her art-making.

Chatterton stipulated only two points for the commission: that it would incorporate Stella's artwork as visual projections and be capable of touring in order to fulfil the objectives of his opera company. My supervisor at The University of Adelaide, Dr Graeme Koehne, approved my involvement with this project.

Chatterton urged me to see the touring exhibition of Stella's works which was curated by Lola Wilkins of the Australian War Memorial from private, public and university collections around the world. I flew to Sydney to see the exhibition *Stella Bowen Art, Love & War*, and discovered my empathy with her works. I spent two days noting down all my impressions of each of the paintings, reacting to the symbolism and pain she encoded with colour, line and formal composition to create images of classical serenity with disturbing undertones. I briefly met her family and attended a symposium of speakers on Bowen's life.

This rich introduction to Bowen was augmented when I found that the Barr Smith Library at The University of Adelaide had a wonderfully deep and wide collection of works of early 20<sup>th</sup> century British writers, who were the other players in Stella's life story. In particular, they had many original works by Ford Madox Ford, Violet Hunt and Jean Rhys as well as extensive commentaries and biographies on these writers. Diaries, letters, poetry, essay, fairytales, semi-fictionalised novels such as *Quartet* (1928) by Jean Rhys and autobiographies gave me a wealth of historical material about their lives. I developed a spreadsheet of the chronology of their biographical stories and how Bowen's paintings interacted with dramatic and artistic themes emerging from my reading of the literature.

From the early readings, I sketched the dramatic highs and lows of Bowen's story and met with Co-Opera dramaturg Johanna Allen to begin to scope the narrative into a two act, nine scene drama. I decided to write a chamber opera, an intimate inward form with the emotional interiority equivalent to Bowen's many paintings set inside rooms looking out. Originally, the script had a first scene set in Adelaide, but this scene was later deleted due to Bowen family pressure. I also met with potential Co-Opera theatre and visual arts collaborators on the project, called *Stella's Gaze* at this stage.

A fulfilling part of this experience was being able to work with such sources as Stella Bowen's close family members who lived in Adelaide. I had several meetings with her niece, Suzie Brookman and husband Graham, who shared the family scrapbook with original photos of works and her life. We talked about her background and I developed Stella's family tree to understand her genetic and

ancestral influences. Her grandfather was a respected Adelaide builder from early in the city's history and she grew up in his large stone home overlooking the North Adelaide parklands with French windows. Understanding this background helped me shape her musical dramatic character of gracious, conservative respectability.

As I researched lives of the characters, I kept a running log of interesting or pertinent themes, stories, scenes, quotes or attitudes of the characters, placing this material into hand-written logs and computer files of each of the nine scenes. These sources often inspired me to create a song lyric directly, especially if they combined two strong images together. By July 2003, I had 55 songs to select for inclusion in the libretto, ranging from solos, duets, trios and choruses.

The inherent drama between characters also led me to write words for two solos being sung in parallel, to reflect how each person only saw life from their own view but impacting on each other at the same time. I used this technique in *The Hunt*, where Stella and Violet sing about opposing experiences of love as younger and older women and in *Lost and Found*, where Ford and Jean's separate solos then blend as a love duet expressing the beauty they found in their illicit love affair.

With most of the reading and interviews completed in the first six months, I then wrote out plans of themes to integrate as drama. I included detailed information from the many books on the characters' lives and potential treatment of musical ideas, the role of dialogue, etc. in a first draft libretto, called *La Palette*, Bowen's pen name as an art critic in London in the late 1930s.

I was greatly encouraged when I discovered four original scripts of Bowen's in the BBC Radio Archives which included her June 1944 broadcast about the painting *Bomber crew* (1944), central to my ideas of how to shape the opera. I obtained copyright permission to use her words directly and these form her spoken monologue in the *Prologue*. They introduce the biographical reality of the character before entering my imagined story, creating the awareness of both fiction and reality, one of *The Portrait's* themes about writers and time.

I had just finished writing the words for the scene of Ford's death when my husband was hospitalised with the same hallucinatory illness, bringing the fiction too close to my own life. I slowed work on the project as we learned he had terminal cancer, but continued to refine the libretto. I mailed it to interested stakeholders, family members and international experts on the characters. From feedback, I deleted Stella's mother, brother and Adelaide from the story and sharpened the character of Violet Hunt with assistance from Joseph Wiesenfarth, international Ford expert and author of *Ford Madox Ford and the Regiment of Women*, *Violet Hunt*, *Jean Rhys*, *Stella Bowen*, *Janice Biala*.

Some of the family never agreed with my treatment of Stella's love life and have forbidden me to use images of the paintings they own, preferring a more hagiographic approach to their respected relative. I took legal advice about matters of copyright as there are over 40 images in the show which are integrally connected with the script and formed my own company to hold the rights for these works.

I received compassionate leave from the University from October 2003 to care for my husband and family and ceased work on the project. My real life drama

overtook the fiction, with my husband dying in May 2004. However, three months later, Brian Chatterton convinced me to create a mini-libretto for a short version of the story to help Co-Opera acquit its funding grants. This offer got me back into the story and I enjoyed the challenge of shortening the work, making Ford Madox Ford the main character in *The Ford*. From that step, I then decided it was better to tell the whole story as *The Portrait* and re-commenced the libretto as a full-length chamber opera. I promised Brian Chatterton to have a score ready for an opera workshop in June 2005.

In November 2004, I travelled to London and Paris for the first time, to see where Stella had lived and painted. Experiencing neighbourhoods where she had lived, helped ground her story in the genteel reality she sought. I also researched French and English music from this interwar era with CDs and sheet music. I began to write the music for some sample songs for Co-Opera to rehearse and record so they could begin to hear the sound world I anticipated creating in the opera, beginning with *King and Queen of Ten Acres* and *Love Addict*.

On return from my extended overseas trip, where I had edited the libretto and developed an overall musical schema for the music to develop throughout the opera, I threw myself into work on the music, writing one song every 2-3 days for three months. I starting from the *Prologue* and working step by step through the narrative, guided by an overall structured musical plan of possible orchestrations later on, dance forms, key and time signatures.

Through my musical composition, I wanted to explore both the question that Bowen had asked herself in *Drawn from Life, a memoir* (1941): “Why are people allowed – and women encouraged – to stake their lives, careers, economic position and hopes of happiness on love?” and the dilemma that Ford had mused on in *The Good Soldier* (1915), “I know nothing, nothing in the world...of the hearts of men. I only know I am alone...horribly alone.”

The songs tended to progress in complexity as I gained confidence in my writing and went deeper into the darker parts of the story and character development. With Brian Chatterton, I began to audition and assemble potential cast members. This small group began to try out and record songs as I composed them, which I used for early radio publicity about the show and to assist the Director to hear the music so she could plan the direction for this new opera. I flew to Wagga Wagga to meet the Director, Tessa Bremner, who helped edit my libretto, acting as an experienced opera theatre mentor for me in my first operatic composing experience.

One week before our workshop, we cast our final member, Pelham Andrews as Ford, with his impressive deep baritone capable of the long low F ending of *Someone Like Your Father*. We rehearsed in the Wool Shed of the Royal Adelaide Showgrounds for four weeks with seven singers and Anthony Hunt as pianist and Musical Director at Co-Opera studio. The singers learned the music, then were blocked on a low stage by Tessa.

I was available for questions and clarifications about the music or text and their interpretation worked with the ensemble on getting the most realistic dialogue and wrote new linking music or songs as required in the kitchen of the Wool Shed while rehearsals continued. Some song order was changed. For example, Violet’s *Once, I*

*Turned Heads* was taken from Scene 5 to Scene 2. Twenty minutes of music was cut, mainly extra verses and I wrote ten minutes of new music, including the ending. The music and words of *With Brave Heart* started during a 5am swimming session and I arrived at rehearsals with a finished computer-notated score at 11am that day. Of the initial 55 song lyrics I wrote in the research phase, 31 remained in the final work.

In addition to the composing and librettist role, I also took on roles in the stage production and technical aspect of the work to augment Co-Opera's very small technical staff. All of the furniture in the production is from my home, as is the print of Bowen's painting *Roses and a blue kettle*. I sourced costumes and sewed accessories. Working with the Director and technician, I created the visual projections from my source material, many of them animated to go with the music. I also assisted in the promotion of the workshop performances, creating invitations and writing 4-pages of program notes. In addition, I organised to show war art from my own collection: six early tinted photographs of the destruction of World War I by Frank Hurley which I wanted to tie in with Bowen and Ford's depictions of their war experience.<sup>1</sup>

The experience of learning how to create a piece of music theatre is a very multi-faceted one and, as a first-time writer for this medium, I was aware I could learn much from audience feedback to my work. The audience are an important part of the team of creating a piece of music theatre and if their feedback is valued as a gift and not a threat, the composer/librettist has extra tools to provide an even stronger and meaningful musical experience. My model was the practice of using extensive survey and focus group testing with new productions in commercial theatre in an "out of town" venue in order to refine structure and performance.

As the project was part of my higher degree candidature, I was also interested to employ more academic tools to testing audience reactions to the positive and negative perceptions they had to viewing the workshop performance of *The Portrait* than mere verbal comments afterwards. I have a background in social science research, so used this to shape an audience survey with open-ended qualitative statements to elicit direct responses on both 'most favourite' and 'least favourite' parts of the opera, as well as eliciting general suggestions, criticisms and feedback. I placed the one-page survey form on each chair at the piano workshop and requested audience members to complete it before they left. I then compiled all of the answers in a list to gain insights into the audience's reaction to this new work (see Appendix B: *Work in Progress Audience Survey Results – 2005*).

This proved a strong learning experience for me. I found that almost all of the songs were listed as someone's 'most favourite', which reinforced my belief that the music and lyrics were communicating well with a wide variety of audience expectation and need. I became aware of my own blind spot to the narrative when I realised that many people had not grasped what happened at one point in the narrative. Because this feedback came from several informants, I realised it was a major structural problem to address. With many people confused about the story from 1928, when Stella broke up with Ford to his death in 1939, I then added a monologue by their

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<sup>1</sup> Ford is known as the greatest novelist of World War I experience and the first modernist novelist.

daughter Julie to tell this story over the already written instrumental interlude, *Stella's Theme*.

The idea of individual 'genius', where a composer 'gets it perfectly' does not apply, I believe, to the genre of music theatre writing, which is a team creation. This is especially true for a composer's first attempts at this genre. I took every bit of feedback very seriously and made minor adaptations and changes in the script to meet each one. I worked with the Director to rectify changes that were suggested in pace, staging and costume. With the addition of the orchestrated ensemble instead of the piano score, most of the musical comments were addressed. The exercise of creating the survey form and working with its results definitely helped to shape *The Portrait* into a tighter, more coherent piece.

We held three showings of the first piano version of *The Portrait* in July 2005 and filmed two performances. Later I edited these together with the photographer as a DVD of the performance to be able to show the piece to prospective promoters, funding bodies and possibly submit in my portfolio. One of the people who attended and enjoyed the show was the Program Manager of the Adelaide Festival Centre, who invited us to run the show as a season at their Space Theatre. We had several negotiations with the management over the season's practical dimensions, budget, marketing and technical requirements and began to raise a budget to meet costs.

In addition to script changes, we needed to develop a properly professional set for this opportunity. The director asked for a large palette to be made for the actor/singers to move on, reflecting Bowen's pen name and the raw materials of life for the characters to be drawn from in my tribute to Bowen, an operatic 'portrait'. I worked on revising the visual projections to clarify some of the audience questions and began to collect copyright approvals for use of artwork for February 2006 performances at The Space at the Adelaide festival centre. I also created a website, [www.theportrait.com.au](http://www.theportrait.com.au) to promote the opera.

With a close friend, Rosie Glow, I designed and carried out a targeted radio, newspaper and magazine campaign to promote the show to Adelaide audiences. I had worked with photographer Alex Makeyev and Paul Barrow, graphic designer to create all the designs for posters, program, fliers and the Co-Opera annual program. We attempted to integrate all the publicity with one strong marketing theme: *Four great artists: one great love affair*.

In January 2005, Co-Opera devoted two weeks rehearsal to reviving the show, while as production helper, I spent time hiring and making new costumes, assisting with different lighting and image projection calls. I made notes at each rehearsal and worked with the Musical Director and Director each day on these issues. One of the issues of creating a work with a living composer was of 'hierarchy of authority'. I had to learn that even though it was my work and I had opinions about how it should be, I had to go through the Director to input various suggestions, otherwise the cast got confused about the locus of control in direction. It took me a long time to learn this because it was never stated until the end of these rehearsals, but once I understood the problem, I worked through Tessa with comments.

In February 2005, we produced seven successful performances to approximately 2000 people in the Adelaide season. The audiences ranged over a wide span,

including the Morning Melodies daytime sessions for retired people. *The Portrait* received good critical and public acclaim, with people laughing and crying. Audiences appeared to have felt uplifted both by the story of Bowen and the production itself. I was interviewed by Andrew Ford on the ABC Radio's *The Music Show* the morning after the premiere.

In April 2005, I travelled overseas again and met Mirabel Osler, who knew Stella Bowen as a child, has written an unpublished memoir of Stella and has a large collection of her paintings. Meanwhile, Co-Opera finalised the venues and times for the tour in the states of New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory, and contracted singers, including one change to the performance personnel, the tenor soldier/airman. It had received Playing Australia underwriting assistance to tour with instrumentalists, so I was encouraged to orchestrate the opera for the tour.

I returned to begin the next stage of the development in June and July and consulted with my University supervisor, Dr Koehne about orchestrating the piano work. In two months, I completed the orchestrated score of the ninety-five minute work for seven players using the Sibelius software program and created the players' parts for distribution to them in August. Anthony Hunt had selected a chamber ensemble of current and recent graduates from The University of Adelaide music programs. Again, the cycle of marketing, planning and promotion began. This proved much harder in seven separate regional cities where, as a composer/librettist, I was unknown. People feel suspicions about new opera, so I stressed the accessibility of the story and of the music in this campaign.

There were very few rehearsals before we left on tour, as the majority of the cast knew their roles well. I went to initial read-throughs of the chamber ensemble and had to re-write two orchestrations where the texture was too muddy or too thick when mixed with voices. I had tried a pulsing texture in the strings in *Someone Like Your Father*, but it detracted from the meaning of the words, so simplified this. Questions of dynamics and pacing were handled very well by the now-conductor, Anthony Hunt, whose keen ear and high standards crafted a cohesive, responsive sound that underlay the singers without dominating.

After the invitation-only dress rehearsal in September, I helped the cast and musicians pack the large Co-Opera truck and send it on its way. The next day we flew to Sydney and were picked up in two vans and a station wagon. For the next two and a half weeks, this group of 20 people toured together amiably, adapting to each new venue and audience. I commissioned my photographer to record the final performance in Ballarat and later we edited it into a DVD. This is the DVD included as Audio-Visual Material in my portfolio.

In preparation for submission to the portfolio, I have added markings from player's parts into the main score based on minor changes made during the 'far off Broadway' Australian tour. In February, the score received proofreading by professional editor, Dr John Phillips and I have recently finished putting these detailed changes into the score in this portfolio.

From the above, it is clear that the process of 'writing an opera' is but a small part of the larger tasks involved in getting a new work ready for showing to an audience,

promoting, budgeting, creating the technical and artistic materials for professional performances and evaluation. *The Portrait* was lucky to have an experienced and adaptable touring company believe in it and willing to put its resources and quality personnel behind creating a new piece of Australian operatic repertoire. In terms of a learning experience, it has been a fully absorbing journey with light and shade. I have certainly gained immensely from tackling the music theatre genre under the auspices of the Master of Music program and learning from a professional debut.

Becky Llewellyn  
May 2007

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## *Appendix A*

### ***The Portrait: Work in Progress Audience Survey Results***

Collated by Becky Llewellyn August 2005

The following are the comments received from audience members who attended Co-Opera's July 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> 2005 work-in-progress performances of Becky Llewellyn's opera, *The Portrait* at the Wool Hall, Royal Adelaide Showgrounds, Adelaide. The survey form is attached at the back of these collated results. No attempt has been made to analyse the data in this report. It is the transcription of all the written comments to date.

Co-Opera is very pleased to have received this thoughtful and considered audience feedback which will be very useful in shaping the next stage of the project. Overwhelmingly, it represents a very positive endorsement of the work to this stage.

#### **1. One word you would use to describe your reaction to *The Portrait* \_\_\_\_ because:**

- Impressive – a brave new (almost) contemporary work with tuneful rhythmic music
- Revealing 'tour de force' - better understanding of the courage, intensity, talent, generosity and sadness of Stella, together with her passions. Also, of course, the power of the music/words of Becky Llewellyn and most of all her understanding and insight.
- Impactful – portrayed the full life of Stella Bowen
- Beautiful
- Well-executed
- Interesting - an account of people's lives but Ford was the power
- The Portrait painter
- Excellent – it kept my interest
- Terrific – story, scenery, costumes except for Jean's
- Stunning! Unexpectedly high uniform standard.
- Insightful. I love to know the story or inspiration behind art.
- A full life experience in one night – each facet of Stella's life is brought out movingly with real feeling.
- Fabulous – wonderful production, music and singers lived Stella's life. I felt very sorry for her.
- Fascinating – picture of a time and a group of people who were interesting and creative – both artistically and in their way of living.
- Moving – all of the elements – the story of a woman artist portrayed with such insight and intelligence.
- Vital – a convincing portrayal bringing the personalities to life in a sensitive and sympathetic way.
- Entertaining – musically it was able to capture the period very well.
- Emotional – it's a drama of emotions and their roller-coasters.
- Brilliant – set simplistically yet musically intricate and yet again, easy to follow storyline

- Accessible – real emotions, relevant tunes, very human story, music is not intimidating.
- Mixed – larger than life characters trying to be fitted into a chamber opera.
- Triumph – successful integration of all elements, in particular, music, singing and screen images
- Stunning – it's so vital and new. The music, staging, actors melded into a seamless performance
- Absorbing – It held my interest for the full duration
- Masterpiece – It moved me to tears several times. Very deep! Could identify with lots.
- Classy – Complex, meaningful and sensitive storyline. Evocative recall of the time, roles and behaviour. Genuine and realistic with subtlety of music, lyrics, performers, non-verbals, 'clarity' and beauty of voices. Enthusiastic, professional pianist. Excellent wardrobe, evocative props and tight, lively mood changes.
- Delighted – the story had been described in beautiful music, poetry-prose combined all together.
- Intrigued – I had previously read all the mentioned writings by and about Stella Bowen and had visited the Art Gallery exhibition several times. What could a 'chamber opera' add to these gleanings about her life and times? I loved to see it come alive on stage – an original work – in Adelaide for the first time.
- Stunning – We had been associated with the project since Day 1 (Suzie and Graham Brookman – Stella's niece) but the final product exceeded all expectations.
- Delighted – the pianist was perfect!
- Emotional – It was a very human story encompassing all the emotions most of us go through at some time during our life.
- Great! I liked the music and I found the story of Stella Bowen fascinating.
- Moving – Stella Bowen was clearly deeply affected by her love for Ford M F and her loss of his love
- Satisfying – It contained a bit of everything and the characters were easy to relate to as they didn't seem too foreign from life today.
- Favourable – story well told in word and song. Good use of stage space. I cried at the end!
- Intriguing – I knew little about the protagonist. I felt music and libretto had captured the style and time brilliantly.
- Entertaining – I liked the mixture of drama and humour which was very entertaining and I was totally absorbed. Very accessible for a non-opera person.
- Poignant – moved me so deeply I couldn't speak. From the erotic piece at the end of the first half, I was completely absorbed in the expressiveness of the music, supported so beautifully by the acting and singing (especially Stella), the direction, costume and lighting effects. It carried me into and through the turmoil of love and human relationships as they unfold over a lifetime in a soul-felt way.
- Impacting – it left me thinking about the archetypal pictures that this story represents – the mysterious intertwining of human destinies!

## **2. What was your favourite scene, moment, song?**

- Paris in the 20s and dance and final scene and song With Brave Heart
- The cottage/country
- First song entry and painting
- They were all beautiful
- Jean Rhys
- First Act, especially King and Queen
- I liked the rest very much.
- Final quartet (Go in Peace) and first chorus (G-O-S-S-I-P)
- Stella singing when heart-broken
- *Bal musette* (Paris in the 20s)
- The Forced Choice, quartet (Go in Peace), second half of G-O-S-S-I-P, and With Brave Heart, and the melt down/crack up of Ford's first lover, Violet
- Many – seduction scene, daughter's lullaby solos, ensemble in Act 2 – Paris
- It's rude for lady artist to paint a nude and Daddy Dearest (Lullaby)
- Rude to paint a nude
- Violet's soliloquy on criticism (Proteges and Pets) added an extra dimension
- Love addict tango
- 'nude/rude' was terrifically amusing
- lots
- Ensemble pieces – of gossip and fictions and fairytales. Liked all ensembles
- Female quartet
- Violet's part in Scene 5
- Female quartet at end
- Violet's song in Scene 3 (Once I Turned Heads)
- Stella's desire and Ford's song about writing
- 4 women harmonizing in the last act
- Peace in War, the benediction (inspired) Violet in Proteges and Pets
- Scene 4- first night in Paris
- I'd like to see it all again – but possibly Scene 3
- I enjoyed the whole thing! Good music! Good singing! Good staging!
- Act 1 Scene 3
- The nightclub
- Quartets, whenever sung
- GOSSIP, Reclining Nude and Benediction. Ford's death scene was very emotive.
- The production as a whole and the way that the big stark black shed was transformed by the production into an experience that felt big and satisfying, despite its simplicity and its few artists.

### **3. What was your least favourite part of the performance?**

- Couldn't hear the monologue clearly at the beginning
- Death of Ford – the bed seemed rather overdone on the stage, but the benediction by the four women was superb.
- Dance with masks (Paris in the 20s)
- After the break-up in Act 2
- Proteges and Pets
- Ford's letter writing song (Confession)

- When Ford writing letter – song was terrible.
- The ‘introduction’ in the prologue took rather long – a difficult dramatic operation, I know.
- Don’t be rude and paint.. – a great song, but the irony was lost through staging and inappropriate voice types.
- Needs the colour of an instrumental ensemble – although Anthony Hunt on the piano is absolutely excellent.
- Long romantic bit at tend of Act 1
- Pacing in early part where Stella and Ford fall in love seemed a bit slow.
- Sometimes Ford’s part could have been a little more impassioned – a little static in Scene 2
- The aspects where I felt that it became more Ford’s story than that of Stella
- Paris party after farm scene
- Bit slow after interval, although loved ‘don’t paint a nude’
- Act 1 was a little slow – particularly the final scene
- Scene of conflict between Stella and Jean Rhys
- Difficulty hearing all the words to get the full appreciation
- Ford and soldiers entrance
- Ford’s song about mother England was a little awkward I thought.
- Ending with its mood and focus change, costume and singing of men, ‘space’ on stage, loss of emotional content and flow of story.
- Love addict lyrics, but well performed
- Toward the end, I felt the words were a bit ‘corny’.
- Act II, Scene 6 – Because Ford’s daughter had no time to establish her character. The airmen seemed almost irrelevant to the love story and Stella’s career.
- When Ford was dying
- The first part amused me but did not ‘move me’ artistically. But it always takes me 20-30 minutes to get into an opera (even ‘The Ring’).

#### **4. Were there points in the story you could not understand?**

- The synopsis helped in the flow
- The booklet helped clarify about Jean Rhys coming to live with them which wasn’t too clear in the song
- Don’t know what the letter writing was about – or was it story writing?
- Letter writing? How Jean came on the scene?
- Maybe the scene setting of the earlier parts, but then the story crystallizes well with love split.
- Seemed clear to me but I had some background – might be different for others.
- No – good intermingling of ‘dreamlike’ and reality in lyrics, script and music
- Final scene was a little confusing without reading the program notes – needed refining to me.
- The period between 1926 – 1944 was a little ambiguous – more clarity needed
- No – the synopsis gave really good background
- Couldn’t hear all the words of Jean Rhys

- On seeing the opera alone, I could not understand why Ford was important. On reading the Cambridge Companion to Literature I now know that he was much more active as a writer than appeared.
- I had no idea they had a baby till she sang as an adult by his bedside. I didn't know what the song with the red scarf was about.

**5. Were there any times where you felt the show dragged or you were not absorbed?**

- The deathbed of poor old Ford. I began to feel sorry for the man – surprisingly.
- Absolutely not
- Second verse of Proteges and Pets
- Dying scene went on too long and love addict didn't work for me.
- Proteges and Pets went on too long, but loved the scarf and shadow effects. Paint a nude went on too long.
- Ford, Violet and Jean singing together in Scene 5??
- Always absorbed with the brilliant performances. Bit repetitive in Act 2.
- It all went too quickly!
- Yes! Lets have more of Ford's seduction by word and less about the physical romance.
- Love addict scene a bit long
- I felt uncomfortable with the Jean Rhys character
- Death scene dragged a bit
- Perhaps because I knew nothing of Ford or Stella previously, Ford seemed to be depicted as a sponger, while Stella had a career not satisfactorily developed. Jean Rhys is now remembered as a writer too, not just a rival.

**6. Would you have liked more of any particular section?**

- It was well balanced
- Love scene in Act 1
- It should be just a little tighter
- Well balanced! I would have enjoyed more, but that would have damaged the artistic integrity.
- Ensemble numbers with the very strong cast
- All of it – tuneful
- Enjoyed the spoof 'don't' paint a rude nude'
- Act 1 worked very well – it is possible to perhaps extend a little?
- Too big a jump between 1926 – 1939 – Stella's strength is jumped over
- Prelude. Would have liked more of Stella's (current) career success.
- Given the kaleidoscopic nature of the structure with varying styles of music, it actually worked quite well.
- I enjoyed the unexpected levity about the song about agents (How to succeed in art). The party scenes were wonderful too – more light heartedness perhaps.
- More of Stella and career – less of Ford and his lovers
- Would have liked more of the Ford/Julie relationship in happier times
- No, felt it was perfectly proportioned

- Perhaps more of *The Dark Night*. I liked the strength Stella showed when she kicked out Ford and Jean and started painting (which contrasts wonderfully with her naive manner when we first meet her. I would have loved to have seen more of her work in the visual display when she finally has a chance to get on with her life's passion.

**7. Would you recommend this show to friends when it comes to full production?**

Yes – 30 No – 0 Yes with three ticks – 4 Yes with 9 ticks – 1 Yes but needs refining  
Yes, unequivocally. Yes would love to see it again.

**8. Opera is made up of many elements: characters, music, lighting, dancing, staging, costumes, plot, singing, comedy, drama, screen images, and themes. We'd value your comments on any of these elements in *The Portrait* and welcome other suggestions, criticisms and feedback:**

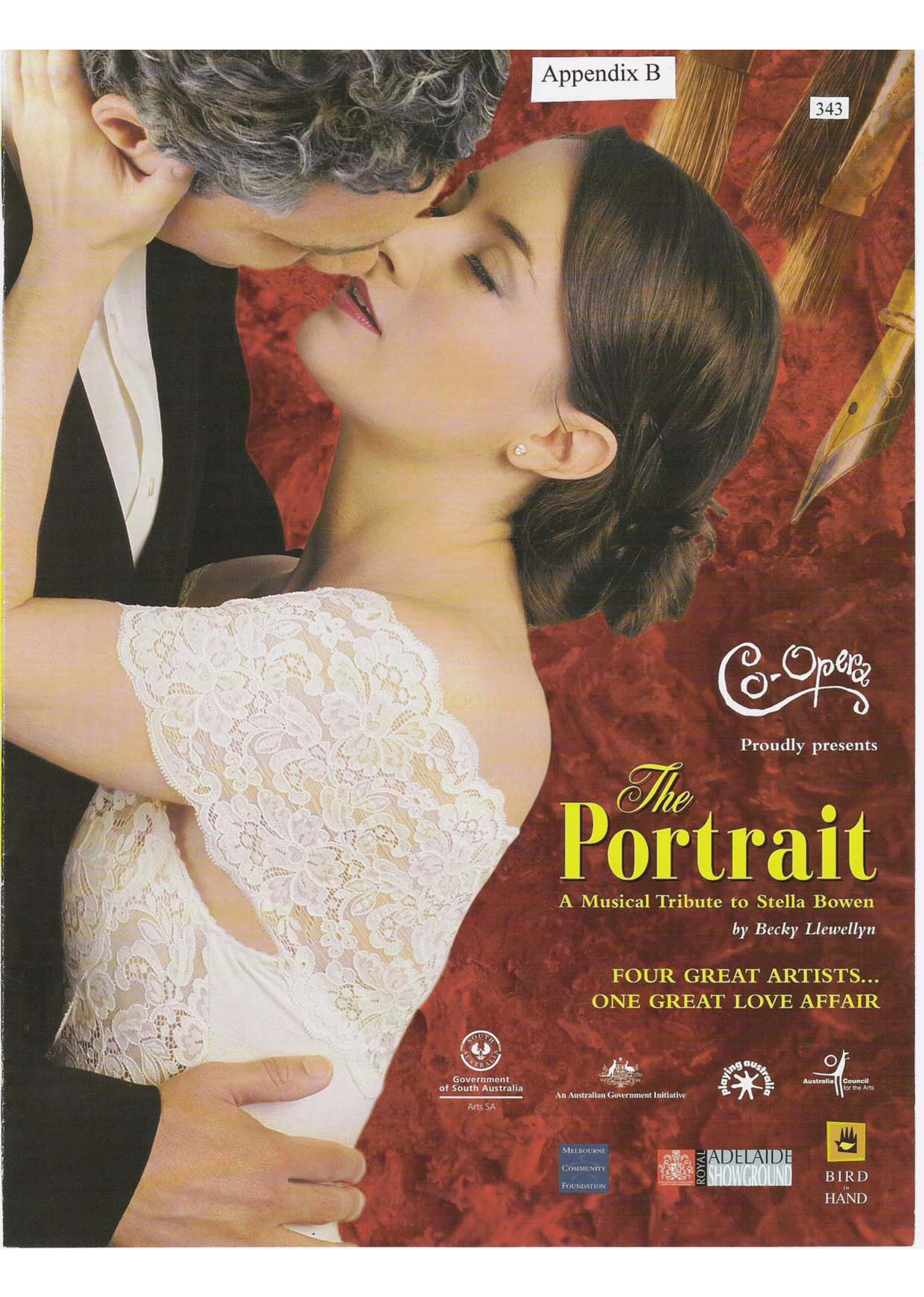
- Images on back screen effective, especially Bomber Crew appearing individually
- Excellent direction lifted certain moments to bring incidents to life.
- Certainly 'The Portrait' deserves the funding it needs for a full presentation – Congratulations to all concerned for a unique production of an Australian, in fact, South Australian, opera.
- Very enjoyable in this relaxed atmosphere. Expert direction very clear and wonderful performers. Thank you.
- The set-up in the Wool Hall was to me excellent. The atmosphere and ambience. Those involved seemed cheerful, optimistic and very competent. More screen images would have been great. It was difficult to hear most words, perhaps my fault. All the voices were indeed pleasing and the pianist impressed me greatly. The razz-matazz of the 20s and the "French Fridays" fun were well portrayed. Thank you for a memorable experience.
- Lighting, screen images added great impact. Dancing well done.
- Couldn't hear Stella's spoken words. Costumes were good. Keep it to 1 hour – long enough for this story.
- The adherence to rhyme was sometimes contrived, eg 'in pantses' (*Women Today*).
- I really enjoyed the use of portraits as data projections – not overdone. A great evening out. I'll come again.
- Violet's enunciation unclear but beautiful voice and emotion fitted the part. Stella was excellent.
- It is a long time since I felt such a cohesive, complete work. This is more to the point since it is said to still be evolving. A wonderful show, cast, script and score!
- Julie was very good too. Jean was cast wrong – too hard and old for the part. Violet's singing could not understand a word she sang. Stella was perfect for the part. Great singing, good costumes and emotional performance.
- The tragedy of the situation is only heightened by the contrast with the happy times. Although I cried, I didn't feel the 'cottage' life was really explored – didn't like 'the king and queen of our cottage' song. Sets and backdrop really supported. In fact they were essential to my enjoyment and understanding. Would have liked some cooler costumes.

- Love lots of things about the production. Very good cast- superb. Well cast. Lighting, costumes very professional, beautiful!
- Just hope that more are able to see such a wonderful opera, music, actors and production.
- In a couple of places, extended notes at ends of songs on unsympathetic words were drawn out – probably being too picky. Ford – get your tie right! (or was that deliberate?) Nappy folding is a good touch. I liked the paper going flying when Stella picked up her brushes after chucking Ford and Jean out – rejecting his work that she had been playing second fiddle to. Death scene good – very touching, maybe a bit long. The last scene with airmen was excellent. Very engaging lead singers. I've read all of Stella's biographies and her autobiography. I liked the notes too.
- Costumes good
- Character of FMF needs to portray a wider range of emotions – a little static and colourless in contrast to the other characters.
- Lighting was great as too were projections. Costumes were excellent.
- Great ensemble – very nappy. Effective visualization!
- I believe this work should go to full production as while it is about a local setting, it includes complexities of war, Europe, Paris and the political times.
- Felt Stella should have aged cosmetically through the production. Overall fantastic. Well done to Becky and all.
- Musically could be more adventurous – a little twee at times. I enjoyed the dialogue at the beginning – perhaps could have more dialogue/monologue in order to capture the characters more. It was a little 'high school production' at times – mainly the lyrics, BUT lots of great moments. Act 2 had a lot more impact than Act 1, especially the female quartet.
- Becky mentions Stella's 'self-deprecating, ironic and humourous nature' but I don't think that comes across. She still comes across as a victim. I understand the concentration on the love story but I think by making Jean Rhys such a big character, Stella is belittled. I think also FMF is belittled by this concentration on the pedestrian. I think music is good for a chamber opera, but I think the opera could be bigger in all senses (not necessarily more expensive.)
- Screen images were very effective. Some of the piano music seemed too staccato for the stage action it accompanied. The piano was too loud at times. Before seeing the opera again, I would like to read the libretto.
- Violet's solo is dramatic, stunning. I had difficulty with the words but it didn't really matter. Particularly enjoyed screen image backdrop and lighting – greatly added to the story.
- Some of the lighting pools were obviously difficult for the singers to find. Lovely balance of voices and movement. Diction superb. The rear screen was a little indistinct at times. The venue worked well.
- The partial introductions to Stella's nude and the paintings of the bombers were tantalizing. I missed a few of the words. Could Stella project a little more? Harder when she is facing away. I thought the music led well into different scenes, changing the mood immediately.

- Superb ‘painting’ gestures by Stella and emotional expression peerless. Superb ‘freezes’ of actors. Outstanding story, dance, costumes, mood and ‘natural behaviour’ of all women. Ford could have been ‘aged’ with hair streaks.
- Some images were important but most were poorly presented and or badly lit – better quality and more would be welcome. Costumes could be readily improved, especially the service uniforms. Ford was twice Stella’s age when they met but could have been her son – a little aging would be realistic. Pianist was great but drowned some of the words, especially the spoken ones at the beginning. Probably easier to handle in a more suitable venue. Music and singing was first rate and Ford’s effort a triumph. Can’t wait for the real thing – good luck!!
- Why did Jessica Dean wear a red headband at one stage? I don’t want an answer but it did seem a little out of place.
- I felt the screen images were excellent, adding to the production without distracting from the performance. The voices were wonderful although I had a little difficulty distinguishing Violet’s lyrics but her acting and quality of voice was superb. While at times I wanted to give Ford a good shake – which shows how well he was portrayed – I also wanted to shake the women in his life. Altogether a wonderful production. I’m looking forward to seeing it again.
- The women’s clothes were wonderful but I didn’t feel that Ford Madox Ford’s clothes were quite right for the period. They looked too modern. I would have liked to have known more about Ford as a literary figure. I didn’t quite understand WHY Stella was so stuck on him. He seemed fairly unattractive to me. I realize that the real Ford behaved rather badly. Still he must have had a lively intellect to appeal to Stella Bowen. I did not feel that this quite came across. It could not just have been because he was physically attractive. To me, he did not SEEM like a poet.
- The introduction of a chorus of airmen in uniform at the last scene would be a great way of singing both a requiem for Ford and the airmen themselves. More subsidiary characters at times would give the work more fullness. Some greater cognition of Ford’s literary career and life’s work would help give a more balanced portrait of hi. Some more work on Stella as an artist would help flesh her out (perhaps a nude model or 2 on stage)?
- Costumes and set were effective and pleasing, as were the projections. Hated Jean’s sleeveless black top and would have believed her character more with a better costume and different hair. The staging was wonderful – loved the contrast between the busy, dance-filled scenes and relatively still scenes. Also the contrast between humour and emotion. All the performers were fab and convincing and the singing was beautiful.
- Spoken narration in the Prelude hard to hear over the piano. Once they start singing, it’s OK.
- The cloth cap worn in Stella’s presence by one of the 2 pilots to be painted would have been taken off in a woman’s presence. Felt that Stella needed a feistier voice to take on Ford and the other two women.
- Really liked Violet’s shadow being cast onto the screen behind her. A very minor comment is that Stella doesn’t express fully her great love of painting or her skills are not spoken of enough (unless I missed it). As an audience I wonder if we

don't fully appreciate her frustration at domestic work as she dutifully looks after Ford. Maybe I should accept that as given but wonder if people not familiar with the passionate nature of painters really appreciate what she gave up in order to love Ford as she so obviously did. Can't believe Co-Opera did ALL that in four weeks! Four and a half "tridents" from me!

- Overall, I liked 'The Portrait' very much, appreciating particularly that it could move me so deeply in my soul, a beautiful contribution to reflecting on the journeys of romantic love. I would certainly recommend it highly to friends.



*Co-Opera*

Proudly presents

# The Portrait

A Musical Tribute to Stella Bowen

by Becky Llewellyn

**FOUR GREAT ARTISTS...  
ONE GREAT LOVE AFFAIR**



# Synopsis

## 1944 Prelude

Captain Stella Bowen at the Binbrook, UK, RAF Station begins painting Australian airmen. As she works, she remembers Ford, the writer, WWI soldier and former lover and wonders, what if...?

## ACT I

### 1917 Scene 1 - War and Peace

Captain Ford Madox Hueffer (later Ford) bemoans the fate of artists in England and women today while his current lover and novelist Violet Hunt has afternoon tea with her young protégé, Stella Bowen.



Ford Madox Ford

### 1917 Scene 2 - The Oldest Game

Partygoers at Violet and Ford's London flat indulge in their favourite pastime, G-O-S-S-I-P. Ford sees Stella for the first time and wonders if she might be what he's looking for. Partygoers muse on writers, their fictions and fairytales.

### 1919 Scene 3 - Seductions

Ford and Stella fall in love writing letters to each other, as he is recuperating from being gassed in WWI. He is caught between loyalty to Violet, 11 years older, who loves him for himself and the dream of a new life with a young love. Violet sings of the pain of being an older woman and warns Stella not to trust romantic love. Stella falls more and more deeply into the spell that Ford has cast, confessing that she is his 'love addict'.



Violet Hunt

## Stella Bowen (1893–1947)

Stella Bowen is not the usual opera tragic, mad or suicidal woman. She was smart, generous and brave. Born in 1893 in North Adelaide, Stella had a relatively privileged, conventional life. A budding amateur painter, she left Australia for England in 1914 to study with Walter Sickert. Over those initially hard years, she became friends with Ezra Pound, mixed with pacifists, writers and painters, while volunteering to help children affected by WWI. The circumstances of this new life, meeting and then falling in love with prominent novelist and influential man of the arts in London, Ford Madox Ford, propelled her out of her comfort zone and created the artist she became.

Stella's life, which she chronicles in her 1941 autobiography *Drawn from Life*, contains many emblematic issues relating to all our lives and the way we are stamped by world circumstances. Apart from some bright years with Ford in France, Stella's life was cramped by WWI, the Depression and WWII. Stella died October 30th 1947.

The story of Stella's endurance prefigures contemporary work/life/family struggles. She never saw herself as a victim and applied her intelligence to any situation with truth and compassion. It is these qualities that make her such an inspirational person.

## INTERVAL

## ACT II

### 1922-1925

#### Scene 4 – The Deal

Ford and Stella, living at Coopers Cottage, Sussex with baby Julie have lost their idealistic enthusiasm for the rustic idyll of farming life. They fight the clock for time to make their art, and decide to move to France to rest

from the drudgery. In Paris they become the toast of the town, hosting regular Friday night *bal musettes* for the French arts crowd. Ford falls in love with Jean Rhys, his personal assistant at *the transatlantic review*. Stella tries to break up the tryst but accepts the forced choice that to keep Ford for her daughter Julie and herself, she must invite Jean to live with them.



Jean Rhys

#### 1926 Scene 5 – The Dark Night

Violet re-appears to remind Stella that art is the business of tears. While painting a reclining nude, Stella is taunted by Jean and her friends' views of "lady" painters. Ford confesses that she picked the wrong man in him, while Jean, now living with them, provokes her saying she is Ford's favourite lover and Stella is redundant. Finally, Stella tells them both to get out and reclaims herself as a woman and a painter.

#### 1939-1944 Scene 6 – Peace in War

Ford has asked Stella to bring their 19-year old daughter Julie to Deauville, France where he lies dying, but refuses to let Stella see him to say good-bye. Stella grieves the end of her fairytale dream. Ford dies and all four women who have loved him sing a benediction. Stella is diverted from her reverie by airmen from the bomber crew she is painting. Stella inspires them with her spirit in responding to the challenge of each day – with a brave heart facing the unknown.

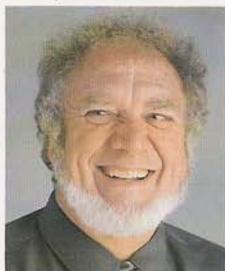


Stella 1943

Becky Llewellyn

# The Origins of The Portrait, a chamber opera about Stella Bowen

**Brian Chatterton OAM**  
General Manager, Co-Opera



The potential for the art and aspects of Stella Bowen's life to provide subject matter for serious musical theatrical treatment became strikingly obvious in the wake of the publication in 1999 of the monograph about Stella (and Grace Cossington Smith) by Drusilla Modjeska and by the 2002-2003 Australian War Memorial touring exhibition, curated by Lola Wilkins. Given the underlying themes, especially as enunciated in Modjeska's book, about the effect of domestic responsibility on the creative output of women, it seemed that a new project to explore musical and dramatic possibilities should be invested with a woman composer, and given Stella's origins, preferably a South Australian one.

Becky Llewellyn's compositional work has been widely known and respected for many years. A concentrated experience of Becky's writing revealed a creative artist of real stature, displaying humour, dramatic power, lyricism, a preference for temperate harmonies and above all, a sensitivity to the musical setting of language. She has become seriously authoritative about the opera's subject matter and brought new layers of sympathy and understanding to the story's major players, especially Ford, whom she regards in some ways as having been inappropriately demonised.

The added potential for a music theatre piece lay in the power and vibrancy of Stella's paintings themselves. It seemed that new ground could be tilled in creating an opera about an artist where large-scale representation of artistic output could be incorporated into the theatrical experience.

## Tessa Bremner

**Director and Dramaturg**



Tessa brings to Co-Opera many skills in the performing arts gleaned from the diverse productions, which she has directed, choreographed or written. She has worked with major opera companies including Opera Australia. She is a lecturer in Acting and Movement for numerous institutions, including the Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga. She directs regularly for the Elder School of Music, University of Adelaide. Tessa is a co-founder of Co-Opera and is in regular demand as a director, dramaturg and performer.

*When I was asked to direct The Portrait I knew very little about Stella Bowen. Drusilla Modjeska's book, Stravinsky's Lunch, had given me a glimpse of the woman. Through lots of reading and working closely with Becky Llewellyn, I have come to know Bowen and her work more intimately. I began rehearsals believing that the opera's main storyline was to do with her, but soon realised that it was as much about Ford Madox Ford.*

*and his constant need for new pastures to feed his literary creativity, as seen through Stella's eyes. Despite Ford's insistence that she had enormous talent, Stella was never able fully to develop this while she was with him. It was when she was on her own and forced to earn her living in whatever way she could, that she became a full-time painter.*

## Becky Llewellyn

**Composer and Librettist**



Becky Llewellyn was born in 1950 and grew up in Minnesota in a large musical family. She migrated to Australia in 1969. Much of her life revolved around her 32-year marriage to Richard Llewellyn AM, a pioneering leader in arts and disability access, who had severe disabilities from polio. She has two children, two step children and three grandchildren.

Becky began composing in the mid-1980s. She studied with Graeme Koehne at the Adelaide Elder School of Music. Her works for chamber ensemble, choir, orchestra and solo performers have delighted audiences in Australia, the US and UK. In 1991, she initiated the influential national *Composing Women's Festival*. Move Records has released *Milerum's Basket*, featuring a selection of her works from the 1990s.

She was commissioned by Co-Opera to develop the libretto and score of *The Portrait* in 2003. The project was interrupted when her husband was diagnosed with terminal cancer, then died in May 2004. After a period of grief and readjustment, Becky wrote the words and music to *The Portrait* from February to May 2005. Co-Opera held three work-in-progress performances in July 2005, shaping the work for the premiere season in Adelaide and interstate tour in September 2006.

## Anthony Hunt

**Musical Director**



Anthony Hunt graduated from the Elder School of Music, University of Adelaide, with a first-class Honours degree in both piano and organ performance. Anthony has been the Musical Director of all the recent State Opera of South Australia's Young Artist Studio productions, highlights of which have included *The Breasts of Tiresias*, *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Candide* and *The Happy Prince*. For the State Opera he was an Assistant Conductor on *La Bobeme* and repiteteured for *La Traviata*. For the Elder School of Music, Anthony directed their 2004 production of *Suor Angelica*, which was performed with his own arrangement for the concert organ in Bonython Hall. Anthony is currently a participant in the Symphony Australia Young Conductor's Development program, gaining conducting experience with most of the Symphony Australia Orchestras. In addition, he maintains his position as Assistant Organist at St Peter's Cathedral.

## Singers

### Jessica Dean *Soprano*

A first-class Honours graduate of the University of Adelaide, Jessica Dean studied voice with Rosalind Martin and Guila Tiver. Jessica has played Yum-Yum in Opera Australia's production of *The Mikado* at the Adelaide Festival Theatre and performed in the State Opera Chorus for *La Boheme* and *La Traviata*. With the Elder School of Music, she has performed the title role in Puccini's *Suor Angelica*, Eurydice in *Orfeo* and Barbarina in *The Marriage of Figaro*. She has been awarded one of Arts SA's Emerging Artists Awards in partnership with Anthony Hunt, with whom she will study in Europe in 2006.

### Pelham Andrews *Bass Baritone*

Pelham Andrews commenced his vocal training in Brisbane before studying history and international politics at the University of Adelaide and singing as a Young Artist and chorister with the State Opera of South Australia. He has appeared in over a dozen productions with the State Opera of South Australia and many oratorios as bass and baritone soloist. The recipient of a number of awards for singing, Pelham was the national winner of the prestigious McDonalds Operatic Aria for 2005 and will undertake further studies in Europe at the end of 2006. Other awards received include the Sally Greenhill and Sydney de Vries Memorial Prizes in 2004, and the 2003 South Australian Opera Aria. He has also been a finalist for the Barilla Italian Opera Award.

### Sarah Sweeting *Mezzo Soprano*

Born in England, Sarah's first major role was Edith in the Broadway version of the *Pirates of Penzance* at the London Palladium. As a soprano, her roles included Donna Elvira, Musetta, Fiordiligi, Countess Almavira, Second Lady, Lui and Leonora *Il Trovatore*. Her mezzo debut was as *Carmen* in the London Opera Festival. More recently she sang at the Royal Opera House, Linbury Theatre and was contracted for three seasons in the UK and Australia with the Royal Carl Rosa Opera Company, singing Pitti Sing in *Mikado* (also released on CD and video), Phoebe in *Yeoman of the Guard* and the title role in *Iolanthe*. Sarah sings Prince Orlovsky in Co-Opera's *Die Fledermaus* and Suzuki in *Madam Butterfly*.

### Tessa Miller *Soprano*

A wide range of styles and great versatility have proved to be a feature of Tessa's career, ranging from opera and oratorio to contemporary song and music theatre. Her love of Baroque music has seen her become one of Australia's top specialists. A Churchill fellowship in 1991 and subsequently a grant from Arts SA in 1995 enabled Tessa to travel to Europe and further her skills in the field. Since then Tessa has given many recitals in Australia as well as in the UK, Hong Kong and China, recording for Hong Kong Radio as well as the ABC in Australia. Early music, the main staple of her career, is certainly not the only field in which she performs. Contemporary music recitals and the creation of new operatic roles and music theatre pieces have seen Tessa tour both nationally and internationally.

### Ben Rasheed *Tenor*

Ben Rasheed has completed a Bachelor of Music (Voice) at the Elder Conservatorium. He is well known to Adelaide audiences through his work with both the Gilbert and Sullivan Society of SA and The George Street Company. He has also worked with the Hills Musical Company, Therry Dramatic Society and Mayfair Theatre Company. He performs with the State Opera of SA and has been a Young Artist. Ben has been a member of the Australian Opera Studio in Perth and performed the role of Oronte in Handel's *Alcina*. In 2005 Ben performed in the opera *Undertow* in Budapest and Helsinki. Ben has played the roles of Gastone, Armed Man, Tamino, Monostatos, Alfredo/Eisentein, Beppe, Goro, Impresario, Ferrando and Flute in eight Co-Opera productions.

### Andrew Turner *Baritone*

Andrew recently returned from Europe where he studied for two years at the Luxembourg Conservatoire. Performances in Europe included the role of Ben in *The Telephone*, First Sailor in *Dido and Aeneas*, Yedinyitsin in *Rayok*, Riff in *West Side Story* for the Festival European in Wiltz, Luxembourg and Masetto in *Don Giovanni* at the Mozart Festival in Cluj, Romania and Luxembourg. Andrew has been a student with the Elder School of Music and now performs with the State Opera of SA. For Co-Opera Andrew has sung the roles of Guglielmo *Così fan tutte*, Tonio and Silvio *Pagliacci*, Falke/Blind *Die Fledermaus*, Poeta *Prima la Musica*, and Quince *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

### Rachel McCall *Soprano*

Rachel McCall completed a Bachelor of Music (Voice) at the Elder Conservatorium in 2001, under the guidance of Rosalind Martin. Rachel went to Europe and studied in Denmark at The University of Copenhagen. In 2005 Rachel performed in the chorus for Opera Australia's *The Mikado* at the Adelaide Festival Centre and joined the State Opera Chorus for *La Boheme* and *La Traviata*. Rachel has performed with many companies across Adelaide: to critical acclaim in Mayfair Theatre's *Les Misérables* as Cosette, and as Polly in Adelaide University's *Threepenny Opera*.

### James Homann *Baritone*

James recently finished an eight-month contract with Oz-Opera, performing the role of 'Strong-man' in *Sid the serpent who wanted to sing* by Malcolm Fox. Other roles include, Lothario *Mignon*, Baldazaar *La Favorite*, Wilfred in *Yeoman of the guard*, Dr Pandolpho in *La serva padrone*, Boccinnio in *Lo sposo delouso*, Pish-Tush in *Mikado*, and Jud Fry in *Oklahoma*. In 2003, James finished his formal music training at the Australian Institute of Music in Sydney, on scholarship and under the tutelage of Ms Petah Burns, where he completed a Diploma of Musical Theatre, Bachelor of Music (Classical Voice) with Honours and started his Masters of Music. James sings the title role in Co-Opera's 2006 production of *Don Giovanni*.

**Images Courtesy of the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide**

Stella Bowen  
*Embankment Gardens*  
c1943, London  
Elder Bequest Fund 1943

Stella Bowen  
*Ford Madox Ford playing solitaire*  
1927, London or Paris  
Gift of Anne Croser, Dr Michael Drew, Geoffrey Hackett-Jones, Penelope Hackett-Jones, Dr Michael Hayes & David McKee through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation Collectors' Club 2003

Stella Bowen  
*Reclining nude*  
1927, Paris  
Gift of Mrs Suzanne Brookman 2003

Stella Bowen  
*Self portrait*  
c1929, Paris  
Gift of Suzanne Brookman, the artist's niece, 1999

**Images Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial**

*Bomber crew* 1944  
*Bomber crew (photo)* 1944  
*Bombing up a Lancaster for Wing Commander Douglas* 1944  
*D-Day, 0300 hours, interrogation hut* 1944-1945  
*Flight from reason* 1941  
*Kit issue at POW reception camp, Eastbourne* 1945  
*Remains of a flying bomb* 1944  
*Salute during Victory March* 1947

**Image Courtesy of the National Gallery of Australia**

*La terrasse* c1931

The Australian War Memorial is one of the world's great museums, holding the largest collection of works of art by Stella Bowen.



Stella Bowen, *A Sunderland crew comes ashore at Pembroke Dock, 1945*  
AWM ART26275  
www.awm.gov.au

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Karl Geiger  
Rosie Glow (Publicity / Editorial)  
Jonathan Holds  
Jane Hylton  
Maggie Johnson  
Mirabel Osler  
Sally Putnam

**Cast**

Stella Bowen	Jessica Dean
Ford Madox Ford	Pelham Andrews James Homann
Violet Hunt / Paris Socialite	Sarah Sweeting
Jean Rhys	Tessa Miller
Julie Ford	Rachel McCall
Soldier / Airman	Benjamin Rasheed
Soldier / Airman	Andrew Turner
Paris Dandy	

**Artistic Production**

Director / Dramaturg	Tessa Bremner
Musical Director	Anthony Hunt
Production Manager / Lighting Designer	Paul Taylor
Screen Designer	Anthony Vade
Wardrobe Consultant	Louise Dunn
Scenic Artist	Max Geddes



Jessica Dean  
Stella Bowen  
Pelham Andrews  
Ford Madox Ford

## Stella Bowen

### An expatriate Australian artist

#### Lola Wilkins, Head of Art Australian War Memorial



Stella 1915

Stella Bowen first came to the attention of the Australian public with the publication of Drusiila Modjeska's insightful biography *Stravinsky's Lunch*. This was followed by the exhibition I curated, *Stella Bowen: art, love & war*, which the Australian War Memorial toured to nine venues across Australia. The interest in this wonderful artist continues to grow and this opera, *The Portrait*, is another means of presenting her fascinating life and her work.

#### Stella on Art:

*I suppose the gift of creating life at a touch is the most enviable gift that a painter can have.*

Esther Gwendolyn (Stella) Bowen was born in Adelaide on 16 May 1893 into a comfortable middle-class family. She particularly enjoyed drawing and convinced her widowed mother to send her to the School of Design to draw from the nude model with Rose McPherson (Margaret Preston) until Preston left for Paris. On the death of her mother, she went to London, studied at the Westminster School of Art with Walter Sickert and became involved in an exciting arts set with Ezra Pound, T S Eliot, Violet Hunt, Edward Wadsworth, Wyndham Lewis and W B Yeats.

#### Stella on Love:

*Why are people allowed – and women encouraged – to stake their lives, careers, economic position, and hopes of happiness on love?*

In 1917 Stella met the writer Ford Madox Ford who was still in the army having served in France. Despite him being twenty years her senior, Stella fell in love. They went to live in dilapidated cottages in picturesque Sussex, where their daughter Julie was born in 1920. With Ford wanting a quiet environment for his writing Stella found it increasingly difficult to continue painting. Finally fed up with the hardships and poverty of rural existence they escaped to the warmth of the south of France.

When their nine-year relationship came to an end Stella was forced to exist entirely on her painting. Eventually her impoverished circumstances compelled her to leave her beloved France and return to England where she supplemented her meagre finances by writing art reviews, teaching and painting portrait commissions.

#### Stella on War:

*War's purpose was destruction, which appeared to be the opposite of our function as would-be artists, or as women.*

In her early fifties Stella was appointed an official war artist by the Australian War Memorial to depict the activities of the Royal Australian Air Force squadrons participating in the intensive bombing operations over Germany. Her plans to return to Australia after the war to mount an exhibition of her work and to see her Adelaide family were thwarted by lack of funds and ill health. She was forced to remain in England, where she died in 1947.

## Co-Opera welcomes and thanks the following Benefactor Patrons

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L Beresford  
Dr D Blackburn  
Charlotte Bright  
Mrs J Brownell  
Dr Kerry Davies  
Lady Downer  
Nicola Downer  
Anna Flach  
Sue Garland  
Mrs Inge Geytenbeek  
SJ & CA Guest  
John Haden  
Mrs J Harris  
Denis Harrison and  
Gulia Tiver  
Martin Hamilton-Smith MP  
Lyndall Hendrickson  
R House  
Mary Kolsniewski  
Raylene & Darrol Magor

Mr & Mrs VN Marden  
John & Kathryn  
McKenzie  
Dr & Mrs C Moten  
Jan & Peter Olds  
Dr Gill Pitchon  
Christabel Saddler  
Mrs Margaret Saddler  
Julie Sargeant  
Mr RB & Mrs LM Siegele  
Mr TM Siegele  
Rae Sullivan  
Dr Robert Sumner  
Jim & Louise Sumner  
John Tait  
Ann Thelander  
Marjorie Thornton  
Deborah Tucker  
Meg and Don Walker  
Pamela Wall  
Diana Wilkey  
Dr RL Willing

## Co-Opera Management and Administration

#### Board of Management

Ian Hardy           Chairman  
James Sumner      Treasurer  
Brian Chatterton  
Peta Mitchell  
Libby Ellis  
Ruth Hemmerling

#### Administration

Brian Chatterton   General Manager  
Sarah Ferguson    Principal  
                          Administrator  
Lynette Harris     Schools  
                          Co-Ordinator  
Bill Lawson         Front of House  
                          and Volunteers  
                          Co-Ordinator  
Libby Ellis         Chair, Friends  
                          of Co-Opera

Co-Opera was formed in 1990 with the express purpose of presenting opera in new and imaginative ways to new and existing audiences.

To achieve its objectives Co-Opera:

- presents popular works in new ways
- presents new works in popular ways
- performs in unusual venues (Royal Shows, Institute Halls, wineries and outdoor gardens)
- presents opera in the round
- mixes singers with the audience
- maximises the fun and humour in opera
- charges modest ticket prices
- presents opera in cabaret style

Co-Opera is resident at the Royal Adelaide Showgrounds and is generously supported by the Royal Agricultural and Horticultural Society of South Australia.

Become a Benefactor and help keep Co-Opera on the Move. For information about Tax Deductible Donations ring Brian Chatterton on (08) 8388 9428 or [co.opera@bigpond.com](mailto:co.opera@bigpond.com)



Opera on the Move

### Co-Opera Inc

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Mobile 0409 695 952  
Internet [www.co-opera.com.au](http://www.co-opera.com.au)  
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Through Playing Australia, the national performing arts touring program, the Federal Government provides assistance to companies, venues and presenters to make tours of high quality performing arts accessible to more Australians. This means giving professional groups the chance to play to new and diverse audiences, as well as touring high quality performing arts into regional and remote communities. Playing Australia gives all Australians, wherever they live, better access to the country's best performing arts.

Assisted by the South Australian Government through Arts South Australia

Co-Opera's Schools Program *A Mouthful of Opera* is generously supported by Arts South Australia.

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Adelaide Symphony Orchestra  
Hilbig and Associates  
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Bird in Hand Winery, Woodside  
State Opera of South Australia (Wardrobe)

#### Like to become a Friend of Co-Opera?

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for information.

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