

A VOICE FOR THE ANGELS

Opera singer Zoe Drummond is planning to go from Tongala to Teatro alla Scala and took a giant step earlier this month winning the Marianne Mathy Scholarship. Zoe is currently attending London's Guildhall School of Music and Drama and has worked with Opera Australia. Read her amazing story on pages 10 and 11 today.

Photo: Kann Huang

INSIDE TODAY:



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REAL ESTATE STARTS PAGE 19

INSIDE MONDAY:



X MARKS THE SPOT
MONDAY CONVERSATION

By Ivy Jensen

SARAH HOLMAN is in a race against time to try and save her best friend's life.

The Echuca woman needs to get \$200,000 to pay for a medivac flight for Kristen Dineen from Denpasar to the US for cancer treatment.

Sarah, who has been living in Bali for the past three years, said her friend went to the doctor for what she thought was sinusitis and was told she had five brain tumours.

Since Sarah took her campaign to social media news of the shock diagnosis has spread around the world.

In just one day \$US60,000 was sent to her *gofundme* page and

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now, five days later, it has hit \$US150,000.

The page has now been shared more than 3400 times and 1786 people have sent money.

“Kristen’s my best friend. She’s my girl, not just in Bali but around the world. We do dinner together every night, we’re always together; we spend weekends doing various things in Bali. We’re pretty inseparable really,” she said.

The seriousness of the situation set in quick, with Kristen previously battling and beating melanoma in her early 20s.

“Alarm bells went off immediately because of her prior illness. Kristen’s oncologist in the US was immediately notified as well as her family and friends,” Sarah said.

“Our primary concern was just to get Kristen home because it was looking to be a massive diagnosis

and our priority was just to get her back to the States,” she said.

Because of Kristen’s medical history, her travel insurance does not cover the costs of her trip home and the costs of an air ambulance are out of reach for her loved ones.

The money already raised has allowed Kristen to be transported by emergency air ambulance to Singapore while she waits for money to reach San Diego.

Kristen has been treated with a dose of steroids to reduce the pressure on her brain and stop the growth, meaning time is critical.

“This means she’s in optimum flying time,” Sarah said. “We’re on huge time constraints to get her home in the safest possible manner while these steroids are still doing their job.”

SOS FOR BFF’S LIFE

FULL
STORY
PAGE 5

A RIVERINE HERALD SPECIAL REPORT

‘I love the singing but I also love the total performance of the stage. I am proud to be 100 per cent committed to opera and an opera career. I don’t go out, I don’t drink; my whole life is shaped by what I have to do to be a singer ’

From previous page

BECAUSE Zoe was in no doubt much of her inspiration belonged to her earliest influences – that would be Dianne Henss, her first teacher who has retired to Patho, and Echuca Moama Theatre Company, which convinced the young girl the stage was where she belonged.

Dianne also got her into the Campaspe Youth Choir, an experience Zoe still rated enormously as an early – and very happy – influence (it was founded by Dianne).

“We were also really into EMTC,” Zoe said.

“Shows such as *Oklahoma*, *Wizard of Oz* and *Seven Little Australians* gave me an introduction to some of the musical greats and at the same time Dianne was working with my young voice and she taught me so much; I owe her so much,” she said.

While all this was going on her mother Jodie was driving her everywhere she needed to be; father Andrew loved being in the EMTC chorus and involved in it all, and her sisters who also loved singing.

“My older sister Kyra is with contemporary arts company CreateAbility, based in Bendigo, and they are currently delivering their latest show, *No Hands*, in Albury-Wodonga.

“Ruby, my younger sister, is studying to be a nurse and has performed in shows such as *The Addams Family*.”

Clearly music and performance are in her DNA, which might also explain Zoe’s competition success – she also won the Lady Fairfax New York Scholarship in 2016 (and took it up in 2017), and was a Melba Opera Trust Scholar for three consecutive years.

“At home I have sung with Victorian Opera and Opera Australia, in *The Eighth Wonder* and *Two Weddings*, *One Bride* and have performed lead roles, in the chorus and recitals as well – at this stage of my career it is all about performing as much as you can, honing your skills and getting known.”

And while she worked at that, Zoe was not afraid to admit she could also be as star-struck as the next person.

While performing in the chorus for Opera Australia’s 2017 winter series, superstar German tenor Jonas Kaufmann came to fill the lead role in Wagner’s *Parsifal*.

“It was so cool being able to see him just getting around, in the green room, and then up close on stage,” she laughed.

“It was just so weird knowing you could turn up each day and he would be right there.”

But Kaufmann stands atop the opera world, Zoe is still getting established.

“Success is not just about having the best voice, it is also timing, being in the right place, people you know, or who know of you, even your health,” Zoe added.

“You can go for an audition and be feeling a little ill, or have a slightly sore throat, and a bad audition can set your career back months, or more,” she said.

“Even being in the wrong frame of mind could affect your performance.”

As with any elite performer – from



COMPETITIVE: A regular on the competition circuit, Zoe is pictured here during the Victorian Eisteddfod. The young singer auditioned in London and performed in Sydney as part of her campaign to win the Mathy Scholarship.

singer to athlete – what you see them do is the very small tip of a seriously large iceberg of effort and preparation hidden from the real world.

At Guildhall Zoe trains seven and eight hours a day, five days a week, then goes home and most days will practice for a couple more hours to make sure she isn’t losing her edge.

Occasionally she might take a day off at the weekend. Just not very often.

“There is a lot more to practice than just singing; there are days when your voice needs a rest, you might have a cold, but that doesn’t mean you have time off,” Zoe explained.

“That’s when you spend time translating pieces, memorising words, listening to others, analyzing text.

“At Guildhall there is a strong emphasis on acting and drama class, one of the reasons I was so keen to come here.

“I love the singing but I also love the total performance of the stage – recitals are great but I crave the acting side as well, where you get into a character, not just a song, how they might walk and talk and the costumes you wear, I find all that such fun.”

Some things, however, are not such fun.

Such as Zoe’s first engagement with Opera Australia, with a performance of *The Eighth Wonder* on the steps of the Opera House and with the audience seated on the forecourt.

She said “it was really exhilarating performing in the rain, and quite funny — I remember looking over to the lady playing my mother, and her false eyelashes had melted halfway down her face; it was so comical”.

Zoe doesn’t have any one song, or opera, that she rates as her goal.

Privately she would love to do *Nanetta* in *Falstaff* (one of her Mathy songs).

But frequently falls in love with whatever opera she is working in. For example, at her London school they will do three in this second year – the first two are *Così fan Tutti* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* with the third not yet announced.

“All I can think of right now is *Così*, I love it,” she said. “After which I am sure I will be having a love affair with *Midsummer*.”

As her training evolves; so does

Zoe’s voice – not the least because of physical changes to her larynx.

It was not something she said she noticed on a day-to-day basis but “even listening to the tapes of the Mathy I can pick differences that weren’t there a year ago,” Zoe said.

One thing that hasn’t come as easily to Zoe has been foreign languages – with most major operas written in French, Italian and German being able to sing them so well that a native speaker would be fooled is her goal.

“Part of my Mathy money will go to language training, probably summer school in Italy and Germany,” Zoe said.

“The European singers are often already bi-or multi-lingual so the transition is much easier for them,” she said.

“I recently started teaching here and in the holidays the children go to places all across Europe; it makes such a difference when it is all in your backyard.”

Speaking of her backyard, Zoe has also found time for a private life with fellow singer Damian Arnold.

The Canberra tenor is also studying at Guildhall and Zoe said it was

“amazing that we were both accepted to the Guildhall at the same time”.

“We met as undergraduates in Sydney and have been together since then,” she said.

“People often think the opera world is full of catty, jealous people but everyone I know is really friendly and helpful and it has never happened to me.

“I went to a performing arts high school; since I have been about 15 the only people I know and study/work with are all doing the same things as me, with the same range of goals – and they have all been super-duper supportive.

“But this is a very tough business and you have to be determined to go all the way.”

Zoe had her own way of explaining what she had achieved to date and what she hoped it would do for her in the future.

“I am proud to be 100 per cent committed to opera and an opera career. I don’t go out, I don’t drink; my whole life is shaped by what I have to do to be a singer.”