

WHAT IS? AN OPERA SINGER

3

Singing at the top of his voice

Chris Lewis, 23, is employed as a Young Artist with West Australian Opera. The Young Artist program nurtures young opera singers in the company, training them and providing opportunities to kick-start their careers. Chris gives ED! an insight into the life of an opera singer.

What training was involved to become a Young Artist?

It starts with basic musical training including piano skills, aural, sight reading and harmony training. The hard work came for me when I started studying at the WA Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA). We train in everything you can imagine: acting, stage fighting, languages, period dance, movement, make-up classes — you name it. I even did a session once that explored the different ways to walk on and off a stage. This is, of course, mixed in with weekly singing and coaching sessions.

What roles have you performed with WA Opera?

I played the role of Handsome in Puccini's *Girl of the Golden West* in 2009. I've also sung Dancairo in *Carmen* and Frank in *Die Fledermaus*. Rehearsals for *Sciarone in Tosca* are currently underway.

Apart from other singers, what other types of people do you work with?

There's our singing coach, who we work with weekly, and the office admin team. Then, in the rehearsal room, you have the conductor, director and sometimes an assistant, the stage manager and assistant and all the production staff. When we get to a performance you add in the make-up team including the wig guys, costume department and all of the stage crew, not to mention the rather large symphony orchestra.

What's the best thing about being an opera singer?

Working with some of the amazing artists who come and fill the major roles at the company, and the satisfaction and excitement of walking out on stage after weeks of preparation and hard work.

What's the worst thing?

As long as you remember all the words it's all good fun.

What are you most looking forward to this year?

The Exploring Opera schools concert (see below) will be great fun and then *Tosca* opens the following night.

Are there many young men singing opera?

Not really, which always surprises me. Where else can you march around in front of an audience, bellowing at the top of your lungs and following after the girl of your dreams?

Exploring Opera: Music and Story

Theatre, singers, orchestra, conductor, lighting and staging will come together in a special short taste of opera for school students at His Majesty's Theatre on April 1 at 11.30am. The cost is \$5 per student. For more details, check www.waopera.asn.au, or contact Luke Pownall on 9278 8913 or luke@waopera.asn.au.

Playing a role: Chris Lewis as Dancairo in the WA Opera performance of *Carmen*.