

Opera weekends to whet the appetite

Could there be a more gorgeous way to while away a weekend than to spend it enjoying the unabashed splendour of a top luxury lodge listening to Italian opera and eating the very best food prepared by an award-winning chef?

Probably not. Luckily for us, two such five-star establishments are putting on events that will attract lovers of the finer things in life like bees to honey. First up is the iconic Huka Lodge's Italian Opera Weekend (Friday April 25 and Saturday April 26). It will be a splendid affair: master of ceremonies and director of the New Zealand Opera School, Jonathan Alver, will be joined by Kiwi opera diva Deborah Wai Kapohe and NZOS alumni (and former New Zealand Opera interns) Bianca Andrew, Edward Laurenson and Oliver Sewell to present a programme of the finest and most-loved Italian works. Their singing will be in perfect harmony with the superb food created by guest chef Stefano Manfredi – Australia's genius of modern Italian cuisine whose restaurants Manfredi at Bells and Osteria Balla Manfredi garner rave reviews and awards across the Tasman.

The vivacious Deborah, who seems to be an ambassador for musically multi-tasking in the most gorgeous way possible, is very excited about the event. "Extremely!" she says. "Particularly the combination of music and food. And singing with Bianca is fabulous. She's a young singer who's going from strength to strength and she's beautiful to look at. But they are all stunning and I'm really looking forward to it."

The repertoire is still in the planning stages but Deborah says they'll probably choose arias from Handel right through to Puccini, starting with "Care salve" from Handel's *Atalanta*. "We'll do some really well-known pieces for people to enjoy and it would be lovely to do a scene from *La bohème*, which will tie in nicely with New Zealand Opera's production later in the year. And we may be tempted to throw in something French, like the "Flower Duet" from *Lakmé*. I'm sure the French and Italians are friends!"

Deborah is an Italianophile and, not surprisingly, loves the cuisine. "Italian food is fantastic and I always make my own pasta." But her request for Stefano? "A modern twist on tiramisu, that's what I'd like. Let's have it deconstructed!"

A little later in the year, the Bay of Many Coves luxury resort, in Queen Charlotte Sound near Picton, will be celebrating its third Italian opera weekend (October 10-12). NZO Freemasons Resident Artists Emma Roxburgh and Morag McDowell will be joined by superstar baritone Jared Holt for a glorious



Singing at the Bay of Many Coves: Jared Holt, Emma Roxburgh and Morag McDowell



Deborah Wai Kapohe

weekend that will start with champagne on arrival by launch and end with the singers farewelling guests from the balcony with the "Soave sia il vento" trio from *Così fan tutte*, before racing down the stairs, along the jetty and jumping into the launch with the guests for the journey home! In between is the now legendary long Italian lunch of about seven courses with musical accompaniment that typically starts around noon and winds up late in the afternoon, courtesy of the resort's executive chef, Hannes Bareiter.

"The weekend has a lovely feel," says Emma. "It's very intimate. The guests get to experience opera up close and afterwards we sit at the table and chat with them about the pieces. It's the most amazing venue, nestled in the bush on one side of the bay. We sing looking out at this beautiful view: one year we saw dolphins as we performed."

Morag usually does the "Queen of the Night" aria from *The Magic Flute* on the Friday night, "to wake them all up", says Emma. "Then we sing all day on Saturday and have the evening off. One year we sat in the jacuzzi and drank wine under the stars. Everybody is made to feel very special."