

Voices raised for Mary

MUSICAL

LORETTA HALL

MacKILLOP, THE MUSICAL

Besen Centre, Burwood, Oct 23-24.

A CAST of 80 is learning the lyrics to *MacKillop - The Musical* as it takes a step closer to its professional world premiere.

Melbourne composer Xavier Brouwer says feedback from the cast about his songbook for this saintly production has been very positive.

And he is delighted Melbourne singer Joanna Cole won the part of Mary — soon to be Australia's first saint — over dozens of others.

"Joanna is a very well-known opera singer and she's very enthusiastic about this musical because she was personally taught music by Josephite nuns," Brouwer says.

Brouwer read a biography of Mary MacKillop, co-founder of the Sisters of St Joseph, seven years ago and thought of turning her life story into a stage musical.

"People say you shouldn't write a musical of someone's life because you are constrained by it but Mary's life was so dramatic and interesting. Her life leapt out from the



Fine-tuning: Xavier Brouwer, composer of *MacKillop*.

pages and represents well on stage."

The musical premieres in Sydney in October in time for Mary's canonisation. It moves to Melbourne the same month, with performances at Burwood's Besen Centre.

There are 80 roles and an orchestra in the production that had an amateur world premiere in 2009.

Brouwer saw the performance by students of Adelaide girls' secondary school Mary MacKillop College and says he was pleased.

"As it is a new work, I am constantly looking at ways of improving the story to make it crystal clear," he says.

Brouwer, 37, plays violin and trumpet and studied composition in Germany.

"In Australia I don't think anyone is making a livelihood out of writing musicals."