

Opera Australia recognises and acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the unceded lands and waters across Australia on which we live, perform, and work. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

We recognise, celebrate, and respect all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first storytellers who carry the cultural wisdom, traditions, and Dreaming of this ancient land.

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WELCOME

TO OPERA AUSTRALIA

Purpose

An opera company for a 21st-century Australia

Mission

To bring an Australian stamp to sharing great stories through music and song

Values

Curious: We are outward-looking, with an appetite to innovate

Creative: We strive for creative excellence in everything we do

Collaborative: We work together in true partnerships

Brave: We invite courageous ideas and conversations

Inclusive: We respect each other and shine when all diverse voices are heard

Opera Australia is a not-for-profit company established for the primary charitable purpose of promoting, encouraging, and producing opera, musical theatre, music, and any other art or performance.



The 2024 *La Bohème* National Tour breathes fresh life into one of the world's favourite operas, supported by the Opera Conference, Australia's national partnership of professional opera companies. Pictured: Danita Weatherstone as Mimi.

Photo: Jeff Busby



Opera Australia (OA) is the nation's premier opera company and one of its most important cultural institutions. With a rich history and global reputation for artistic excellence, Opera Australia is committed to artistic innovation, national reach, and cultural leadership. Each year our company stages critically acclaimed operas, musicals and concerts, attended by hundreds of thousands of people. We perform in our Sydney Opera House and Melbourne State Theatre homes, and in other major cities and regional locations across Australia. We acknowledge, celebrate, and respect all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first storytellers who carry the cultural wisdom, traditions, and Dreaming of this ancient land.

As the largest performing arts employer in Australia's \$64 billion cultural and creative industries, in 2024 we were proud to support a workforce of 1,295 people – 53.2 per cent of whom were artists and musicians, and with more than 30 per cent technical and production employees supporting our performances. Our company includes singers, conductors, orchestral musicians, coaches and répétiteurs, and highly skilled teams working in scenic construction and painting, lighting, design, direction, wardrobe, wig-making, management, and administration.

We look back on our history with pride and look to the future with a determined vision. We are proud to be building on a history of artistic excellence and continuing to work with some of the world's leading artists. Both on and off the stage, we are developing the next generation of Australian artists through initiatives such as the Patricia H. Reid Orchestral Fellowship; the George and Nerissa Johnson Memorial Scholarship Bequest; and our renewed Young Artist Program, a fully-paid 18-month training program which is redefining the way we discover and nurture emerging artists. Today's young artists join many former ones regularly performing with our company each season.

Our company is sensitive to and supports the broader ecosystem of the sector. We work together with other Australian opera companies such as Opera Queensland and Victorian Opera, we support many smaller performing arts organisations, and co-produce an innovative program with some of the world's most renowned opera houses and musical theatre producers. Our diverse programming is supported by our federal and state government partners and our generous donors and sponsors.

As we approach our 70th birthday in 2026, we look forward to captivating audiences with more spectacular performances and opening opera up to newcomers to experience the joy of extraordinary stories shared through music and song.

Traditional opera with a modern twist: *La Traviata* at the Sydney Opera House, featuring Samantha Clark's critically acclaimed portrayal of Violetta. Photo: Keith Saunders

The year was marked by many remarkable artistic achievements, albeit alongside significant challenges. Opera Australia has not been immune from the pressures facing creative sectors around the globe, with some issues continuing to flow from COVID, and we had a number of our own. Despite this, we had a successful year on stage in 2024 and have an innovative and exciting program in place for the remainder of 2025 and into 2026 – our 70th anniversary year – and a clear way forward to underpin Opera Australia's long-term sustainability and success.

The year saw a feast of wonderful music and performance. As well as traditional works, there was considerable collaboration with other companies and organisations; more Australian works or works with an Australian twist; and we saw an array of new talent on our stages. You can appreciate all this as you read through this Annual Report.

2024 began with extraordinary momentum as our Sydney Summer season at the Opera House attracted an audience of over 83,000 people to 68 performances, demonstrating a clear appetite for opera and an appreciation for creative programming. This led to our strongest Sydney Summer box office result since 2019. Highlights included innovative presentations of *La Traviata*, *Orpheus and Eurydice*, *Idomeneo* and *The Magic Flute*. Throughout the year, our stages showcased exceptional artistic excellence, underscoring the vital contribution Opera Australia makes as Australia's largest performing arts company.

I acknowledge the outstanding dedication, talent, and sheer grit demonstrated by our exceptional artists and musicians and, indeed, every member of Opera Australia who contributes enormously on and off stage. Their unwavering commitment to artistic excellence and organisational resilience during a year that was successful in many ways but also extremely demanding, deserves our deep appreciation.

I also acknowledge with appreciation the continued support of the Federal Government through Creative Australia. Combined with the continuing backing from the NSW and Victorian Governments, through Create NSW and Creative Victoria respectively, this support remains foundational to our operations. I also extend special thanks to Destination NSW for its support in 2024 for the staging of *West Side Story* at Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour.

Of course, Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour is made possible every year through the generosity of our Patron-in-Chief, Dr Haruhisa Handa, and the International Foundation for Arts and Culture. Our sincere thanks, and indeed the thanks of all who enjoy this iconic experience on Sydney's amazing harbour.

I express profound gratitude to our supporters whose contributions have been instrumental to our artistic achievements in 2024. The philanthropic community surrounding Opera Australia deserves special recognition; our patrons and donors whose generosity enables us to pursue artistic innovation, maintain world-class standards, and extend our reach to new audiences.



Our corporate sponsors provide crucial investment in our national company, in 2024 notably enabling us to present the BMW Opera for All free concert in Melbourne's Fed Square. This initiative represents the heart of our mission to make opera more accessible and relevant to today's audiences. Our partnership with Qantas continues to be vital in connecting our artists and productions with audiences across Australia, and we gratefully acknowledge HSBC which has donated generously since 2019.

In 2024 the Opera Australia Capital Fund provided \$1.1 million to Opera Australia, bringing total contributions from the Fund since its inception to \$12 million. The Fund's corpus has now reached \$32 million. This enduring financial foundation provides essential stability despite fluctuations in operating revenue.

In 2024 our total revenue reached \$106 million – a strong base of support across diverse income streams. Box office revenue remains our largest source of income at \$50.7 million accounting for 48 per cent of our total revenue.

Unfortunately, I must report that the 2024 year ended with a deficit of \$10.1 million. On a consolidated basis with the Opera Australia Capital Fund, our loss was \$6.1 million. The Board is thoroughly reviewing our financial position and many aspects of our operations. Indeed, we are confident of a much-improved result for 2025 and we expect a small profit in 2026. We have already implemented new processes around Opera Australia's forward programming, musicals, and cost control incorporating a recent review of procurement.

As we undertake these improvement strategies, we are most grateful for the support of Creative Australia that has provided assistance and insight in a number of ways.

I acknowledge the significant contribution to our 2024 programming made by our former Artistic Director Jo Davies, who stepped down at the end of August. Jo and our creative team devised and delivered the company's wonderful opera programming for Sydney and Melbourne following the Sydney Summer season.

I also acknowledge the influential three-year tenure of former CEO Fiona Allan, who resigned in January this year. Fiona provided strategic vision and strong leadership that guided Opera Australia through one of the most challenging periods in its history, and the performing arts sector globally. Under Fiona's direction, Opera Australia boosted its commitment to nurturing Australian talent and wider collaboration, which was all designed to strengthen our contribution to Australia's opera ecosystem.

We are now in the process of recruiting a new CEO, Director of Opera, and a Music Director. This leadership structure is in place in other global opera companies and is one we have relied on in the past, and which will position our company well for the future. Indeed, these appointments coming at the same time offers Opera Australia a real opportunity for renewal.

I extend my deep appreciation to my fellow Board members for their unwavering commitment and expertise. During 2024 we were fortunate to welcome onto the Board Australian recording and performing artist Greta Bradman and Professor Warren Bebbington AM, Professorial Fellow in Music at the University of Melbourne. Their specialist music knowledge strengthens our connection with Australia's vibrant music community.

Again, to our dedicated artists, creatives, and teams, in every part of the company, your resilience, creativity, and commitment remains our greatest asset. As many have said to me, whatever was happening off stage did not affect the excellence and creativity on stage. This is a great tribute to all in our company.

With disciplined execution and the continued support of all stakeholders, I am confident that this very challenging chapter for OA will ultimately strengthen our company and our ability to continue to support the Australian arts sector. The arts is a vital cultural investment that shapes our society's identity, fosters critical thinking, and builds strong communities. The arts are central to us all.



ROD SIMS AO, CHAIR

April 2025

The year commenced with a perfectly pitched production of *La Traviata* at the Sydney Opera House in the Joan Sutherland Theatre, and our New Year's Eve Gala in the Concert Hall. These were both sold-out performances and attracted audiences from across Australia and around the world.

From there, we saw incredible performances during our Sydney Summer season; a major feat in Melbourne staging *Tosca* on a tennis court; groundbreaking contemporary works such as *Breaking the Waves* at Hamer Hall; a successful run of the musical *West Side Story* at Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour; a diverse Sydney Winter season including *Il Trittico* and *Hamlet*, followed by *Sunset Boulevard* after its run in Melbourne. Our National Tour, Puccini's *La Bohème*, visited regional venues in Victoria and NSW, and Burnie in Tasmania. And we welcomed over 85,000 international visitors to opera and musical theatre, only just short of pre-pandemic international visitation levels.

Thanks to Principal Patron Maureen Wheeler AO, our renewed Young Artist Program – the highest-funded of its kind in Opera Australia's history – was launched. Across the year we implemented exciting audience engagement activities, and we expanded community participation initiatives as we welcomed our new Head of Education, Learning and Participation.

While we worked with many international artists, creatives and colleagues, over 80 per cent of cast members and conductors in 2024 were Australian, and 27 young artists were given the opportunity, guidance and platform to grow and succeed.

I acknowledge both the artistic guidance of Jo Davies during 2024 – especially for the critically acclaimed Sydney Winter season – and the passionate and determined leadership of Fiona Allan during her tenure with the company. Every day, I'm inspired by the extraordinary people I work with – from our exceptional musicians and singers to those creating costumes, painting entire worlds onto blank canvases or tracking down the perfect prop on a tight deadline.



ACTING CEO'S REPORT

Behind the curtain and on our stages, teams work with incredible skill and precision, transforming ideas into living, breathing productions. Working alongside them are dedicated producers and administrators and so many others who keep everything running. My thanks also to my fellow Executive Team members for their continued collaboration. They too are talented and passionate individuals.

There is no doubt that 2024 had its significant challenges for our company. As Acting CEO during this period of transition, I appreciate the privilege and responsibility that comes with leading Australia's national opera company and our financial recovery from our deficit position.

To this end, we have conducted a comprehensive review of our 2024 programming and operations and have implemented measures for our 2025 and 2026 programming. Whilst preserving our core capabilities and our many achievements, our forward program has been created to balance artistic vision and financial imperatives. Strategic initiatives and critical choices will help us towards a sustainable future.

Having been involved for almost three years in many aspects of the company, working closely with so many of our people, I have confidence that with discipline and the continued dedication of our teams, we will stabilise our position and rebuild momentum ahead of the company's 70th anniversary in 2026.

I have always been moved by the arts and music and understand the impact it has on each of us. Live theatre is essential because it creates a unique, shared human experience that can't be replicated anywhere else.

I encourage you to review our Annual Report which details the artistic achievements and community impact of Opera Australia in 2024, providing insights into how our performances, programming and the many people who work with us have shaped cultural conversations in communities across Australia.



SIMON MILITANO, ACTING CEO

April 2025

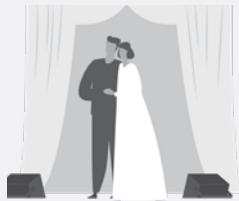
ARTFORM



In her directorial debut with Opera Australia, award-winning director Kate Gaul teamed up with costume designer Anna Cordingley to create a bright, new English-language production of *The Magic Flute*. Pictured: Jennifer Black as Papagena and Ben Mingay as Papageno. Photo: Keith Saunders

BMW OPERA FOR ALL FREE CONCERT, FEDERATION SQUARE, MELBOURNE	3,000
LA BOHÈME NATIONAL TOUR: NSW, VIC, TAS	9,632
BREAKING THE WAVES ARTS CENTRE MELBOURNE	1,152
CHORUS! GEELONG ARTS CENTRE	1,063
CINDERELLA ON NEW YEAR'S EVE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	1,406
COSÌ FAN TUTTE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	7,560
FREDDIE DE TOMMASO: IL TENORE IN CONCERT MELBOURNE RECITAL CENTRE AND SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	1,902
GILGAMESH CARRIAGEWORKS, SYDNEY	2,676
GREAT OPERA HITS SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	33,672
HAMLET SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	7,255
IDOMENEO SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	7,925
THE MAGIC FLUTE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	18,580
THE MAGIC FLUTE GEELONG ARTS CENTRE	2,085
OPERA GALA ON NEW YEAR'S EVE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	2,486
OPERA UP LATE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	875
ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	10,209
THE PUCCINI GALA CONCERT ARTS CENTRE MELBOURNE	4,097
SUNSET BOULEVARD PRINCESS THEATRE, MELBOURNE, AND SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	127,362
THEODORA IN CONCERT SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	2,643
TOSCA SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE AND MARGARET COURT ARENA, MELBOURNE	26,930
LA TRAVIATA SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	25,876
IL TRITTICO SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	6,840
WATERSHED SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	3,814
WEST SIDE STORY HANDA OPERA ON SYDNEY HARBOUR	53,390
TOTAL	362,430

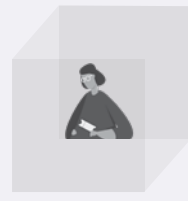
IN SUMMARY



23
TOTAL
PRODUCTIONS



356
TOTAL
PERFORMANCES



\$50.7M
TOTAL
BOX OFFICE



16
OPERAS



5
CONCERTS
AND RECITALS



2
MUSICALS



20
NATIONAL TOUR
LOCATIONS



23
NATIONAL TOUR
PERFORMANCES



268
NATIONAL TOUR
CHILDREN'S CHORUS
MEMBERS FROM
LOCAL COMMUNITIES



137 of 157
NUMBER OF
AUSTRALIAN CAST
AND CONDUCTORS
IN KEY ROLES



9
PRODUCTIONS
NEW
TO AUSTRALIA



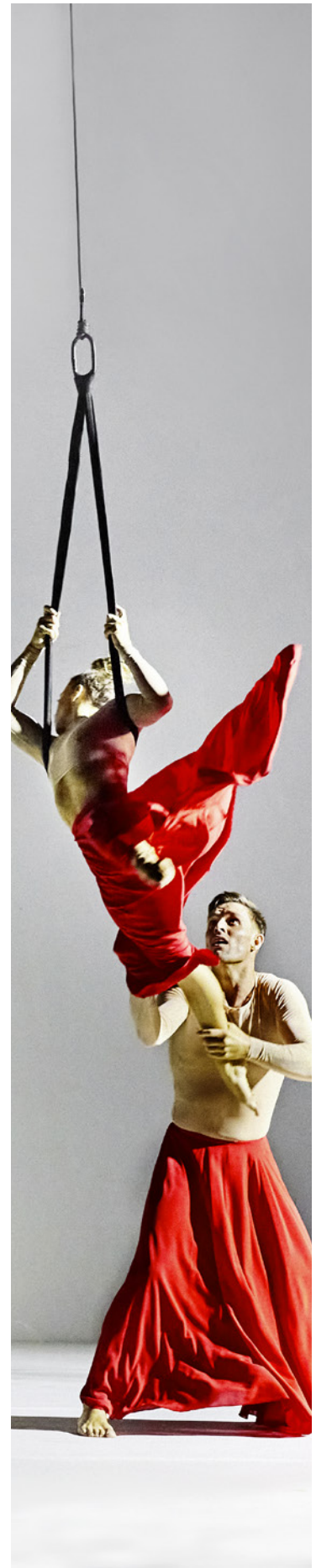
15
NUMBER OF ARTS
COMPANIES
COLLABORATED WITH
ON PRODUCTIONS

With Sydney Summer 2024, we celebrated our most successful box office result since 2019. The season of 68 performances played to over 83,000 people, confirming the potency of opera in contemporary storytelling. Overseeing the successful season was our Guest Creative Director, Lindy Hume AM, who assembled a rich program that highlighted the virtuosity and scope of Australian talent both on and off the stage, as well as featuring a premier selection of international guest artists. For Hume, the season was “uplifting, life-affirming, welcoming, and optimistic”. With female directors, conductors, and designers placed at the helm of several productions, our company substantially raised the gender balance of OA’s creative team membership, demonstrating our dedication to fostering greater gender equity, as we endeavour to also further develop cultural diversity, including supporting First Nations artists and creatives over the long term.

Orpheus and Eurydice broke new ground. Presented in conjunction with Sydney Festival, our debut collaboration with the contemporary circus company Circa was a sell-out hit of the 2024 Sydney Festival, thrilling audiences with a spellbinding performance that melded opera and circus together to dazzling effect. This Sydney premiere of Opera Queensland’s critically acclaimed reimagining of Gluck’s devastating opera, featuring astonishing acrobatics and digital projections, was named by *Guardian Australia* as one of the best live stage experiences of 2024. Gluck’s rousing score was conducted by Dane Lam, with a superb cast headed by French countertenor Christophe Dumaux, making his debut at Sydney Opera House in the role of Orpheus, and Australian soprano Cathy-Di Zhang, who debuted in the roles of both Eurydice and Amor.

Our Sydney premiere of director Sarah Giles’ acclaimed production of *La Traviata* brought a fresh, female perspective to Verdi’s classic opera. For this co-production with Opera Queensland, State Opera South Australia, and West Australian Opera, audiences were invited into the inner world of the tragic Parisian courtesan Violetta who yearns to escape her past. Sopranos Samantha Clarke, in her opera debut at the Sydney Opera House, and Sophie Salvesani delivered rousing performances as Violetta, alongside tenors Kang Wang and Tomas Dalton as Alfredo, and baritones Phillip Rhodes (in his first appearance with Opera Australia) and Luke Gabbedy as Giorgio, with Jessica Cottis (in her OA debut), and Paul Fitzsimon (OA’s longstanding Chorus Master) conducting.

The Sydney premiere of Hume’s energetic production of Mozart’s *Idomeneo* marked our first partnership with Victorian Opera. In collaboration with a stellar team of Australian artists, Hume transposed the Cretan setting to lutruwita Tasmania, with spectacular visuals and an immersive set that provided fresh, local resonance to the epic ancient tale. The production was conducted by celebrated Mozart specialist Johannes Fritzsch, with German-Canadian tenor Michael Schade appearing in his Opera Australia debut in the title role, together with Australian mezzo-soprano Caitlin Hulcup, and Australian sopranos Celeste Lazarenko and Emma Pearson.



Orpheus and Eurydice breaks new ground: In conjunction with Sydney Festival, OA’s debut collaboration with Circa was a sell-out hit of the 2024 Sydney Festival, featuring the Circa Ensemble and Christophe Dumaux. Photo: Keith Saunders

“Curating the Sydney Summer Season in 2024 was a glorious reminder that Australian life is far richer for this extraordinary company of artists, technicians, creative team members, stage managers, musicians, and makers of all kinds.”

LINDY HUME AM, GUEST CREATIVE DIRECTOR



A first partnership with Victorian Opera: Following Mozart's *Idomeneo* Melbourne premiere in 2023, the production saw a season in Sydney in 2024. Celeste Lazarenko as Ilia, Michael Schade as Idomeneo, Caitlin Hulcup as Idamante and Opera Australia Chorus in *Idomeneo*. Photo: Keith Saunders

PERFORMING IN SYDNEY



The summer program also brought to Sydney audiences another refreshed Mozart favourite, *The Magic Flute*. In her directorial debut with OA, award-winning director Kate Gaul teamed up with costume designer Anna Cordingley to create a bright, new English-language production, with conducting honours shared between Austrian-Spanish conductor Teresa Riveiro Böhm (in her Sydney Opera House debut) and OA's esteemed Head of Music, Tahu Matheson.

The dynamic cast was led by Australian-Mauritian soprano Stacey Alleaume in the role of Pamina, Australian tenor Michael Smallwood as Tamino in his debut on the Joan Sutherland Theatre stage, American-

Australian lyric soprano Jennifer Black as Papagena, and Australian bass-baritone Ben Mingay as Papageno in his OA debut. Later in the year the production travelled south, performing at the Geelong Arts Centre.

Demonstrating both the resourcefulness of our creatives and our commitment to sustainability, both *Idomeneo* and *The Magic Flute* were performed on a single set, with scenery recycled from the 1998 OA production of *Werther* designed by Michael Yeargan. The same design team – Cordingley, Richard Roberts, and Verity Hampson – created two very different worlds – one analogue, the other digital – on the same set.

Expanding its mainstage offerings beyond capital cities, Opera Australia's new production of Mozart's classic *The Magic Flute* premiered in Sydney, then at the Geelong Arts Centre. Pictured: Michael Smallwood as Tamino and the Opera Australia Chorus. Photo: Keith Saunders

“We are immensely grateful for the opportunity to embark on our first co-production with Opera Australia - and Pinchgut Opera’s Sydney Opera House debut. This collaboration has brought Baroque opera to a wider audience, and we look forward to celebrating the success of more productions together in the future.”

ILONA BROOKS AND CRESSIDA GRIFFITH,
CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS, PINCHGUT OPERA

Also in 2024 we were delighted to open a new collaborative chapter with our performances of *Theodora in Concert*, in cooperation with highly-praised Baroque specialists Pinchgut Opera. Handel’s dramatic oratorio is set in ancient Rome and features Theodora, a brave young woman (played by Samantha Clarke), and her lover Didymus, a Christian-converted Roman soldier (played by Christopher Lowrey), who strive to defeat an authoritarian tyrant.

The production was Pinchgut Opera’s first performance in the Joan Sutherland Theatre. Pinchgut’s official chorus, Cantillation, provided a rousing ensemble of voices, while The Orchestra of the Antipodes, their flagship orchestra, performed on period instruments, all under the sure hand of the group’s multi-talented Artistic Director, Erin Helyard, who performed on harpsichord. Pinchgut Opera’s co-Executive Directors, Ilona Brooks and Cressida Griffith, enthused about the collaborative experience: “We are immensely grateful for the opportunity to embark on our first co-production with Opera Australia – and Pinchgut Opera’s Sydney Opera House debut,” they said. “This collaboration has brought Baroque opera to a wider audience, and we look forward to celebrating the success of more productions together in the future.”

The exhilarating works of the Sydney Summer season showcased the impressive breadth of artistic talent from across the country and the globe. Lindy Hume, one of Australia’s most acclaimed opera and festival directors, drew on her decades of experience, including at Opera Australia, to create an inspired program: “The season was rounded out with the irrepressible Reuben Kaye returning to the Opera House with his irreverent take on all things operatic in *Opera Up Late*. For the second year, this camp collision of opera and cabaret was directed by Shaun Rennie. It featured operatic tenor Benjamin Rasheed, mezzo-soprano Ruth Strutt, soprano Cathy-Di Zhang, and celebrated musical theatre star Georgina Hopson, with music direction by Opera Australia’s Chorus Master, Paul Fitzsimon. Each of us is privileged to play our part in this great machinery of music and drama. I learned my craft at OA and had an absolute blast as its Guest Creative Director.”



Pinchgut Opera's first performance in the Joan Sutherland Theatre: Helen Sherman as Irene, Samantha Clarke as Theodora, Cantillation, and Orchestra of the Antipodes in *Theodora in Concert*. Photo: Keith Saunders

“A true experience. I have heard and seen Tosca many times but never a performance that was so engrossing, modern, and totally consuming.”

TOSCA AUDIENCE MEMBER



Ingenuity and sustained effort were the order of the day for our 2024 Victorian performances, as we pushed on in our commitment to bringing Australian and international talent to wider audiences. With no access to a lyric theatre in Melbourne while our State Theatre home is upgraded as part of the Melbourne Arts Precinct Transformation project, thanks to the innovative approach of former Artistic Director, Jo Davies, we made a major pivot, presenting *Tosca* on a tennis court. For the Australian premiere of Edward Dick’s acclaimed Opera North production of the Puccini classic, Margaret Court Arena (MCA) was transformed into a grand opera house. To call this a major logistical undertaking is an understatement. To achieve the metamorphosis, we flipped

the script on conventional opera staging by positioning the exceptionally talented Orchestra Victoria musicians (conducted by Garry Walker) on an elevated platform behind the singers who performed on a stage topped with a magnificent suspended gilded dome.

Technical Director Chris Yates, whose association with Opera Australia extends back decades to the late 1980s when he first served as a lighting assistant, told of the challenges of transforming MCA for *Tosca*. The production “had come from Opera North in Leeds, an old and relatively small proscenium arch theatre with 1,500 seats,” he said, “and we had to put it into an 8,000-seat arena. Logistically it was quite complicated. There was a lot of crew and a lot of infrastructure brought in, but

After premiering in Melbourne in May, *Tosca* opened at the Sydney Opera House in June. Pictured: Gevorg Hakobyan as Scarpia and the OA Chorus and Children’s Chorus. Photo: Keith Saunders

PERFORMING IN MELBOURNE

ultimately both the experience and the result were satisfying for all concerned. "I was really proud of it in the end," Yates commented. "The performers enjoyed it, the crew enjoyed it, and the venue management at Melbourne & Olympic Parks and crew loved us being there, putting on a staged production – as The Australian Ballet has also done."

Sharing the heroic title role were OA audience favourite Karah Son and British star Nadine Benjamin. We welcomed Diego Torre back to our stage as Cavaradossi, along with Young Woo Kim, in his Australian debut in the role, while the villainous Scarpia was shared between Helpmann Award-winning baritone Warwick Fyfe and English singer Robert Hayward. Seasoned opera-goers and first-timers alike lavished praise on the production. "My first opera and now a huge fan!" remarked one. "A true experience," gushed another. "I have heard and seen *Tosca* many times but never a performance that was so engrossing, modern and totally consuming."

In a Melbourne exclusive, Opera Australia staged Missy Mazzoli and Royce Vavrek's contemporary opera *Breaking the Waves* at Hamer Hall. Adapted from Lars von Trier's 1996 film about a young Scottish

woman selflessly devoted to her oil rig-worker husband, *Breaking the Waves* pushes at the emotional limits of opera. The cast was led by American-Australian soprano Jennifer Black and Australian-raised baritone Duncan Rock, who reprised his celebrated performance from the work's European premiere at the Edinburgh International Festival. As a company, we are proud to have pushed artistic boundaries to bring this production to the stage, assembling the stunning talents of several female creatives: Melbourne's Anne-Louise Sarks directed the production, while celebrated Australian-British conductor Jessica Cottis led the Orchestra Victoria, with designs by Marg Horwell, fresh from her Olivier Award-winning success on London's West End.

The superb voices of more than forty of our choristers from the Opera Australia Chorus were again on show in the Victorian production of *Chorus!* Fresh from its Sydney Opera House success, the showcase of famous choral pieces hit the road, travelling to Geelong Arts Centre. Directed by Matthew Barclay and conducted by Opera Australia's Chorus Master, Paul Fitzsimon, *Chorus!* showcased famous choral pieces by the



Breaking the Waves: Contemporary opera and female artists and creatives.
Pictured: Australia's most highly-awarded soprano, Emma Matthews. Photo: Jeff Busby

legends of opera, including Tchaikovsky, Wagner, Verdi, and Puccini, in a unique musical and theatrical experience that brought the essential talents of the OA Chorus centre stage.

For The Puccini Gala Concert, soprano sensation Nicole Car made a triumphant return to her hometown, alongside internationally renowned tenor Young Woo Kim and a fabulous cast of singers, including OA principal soprano Julie Lea Goodwin and Australian baritone Peter Coleman-Wright AO, who demonstrated versatility and flair by doubling as the event's emcee. With 2024 marking the centenary of Puccini's passing, the two Melbourne-

only concerts at Hamer Hall presented a glittering array of moving arias and duets in celebration of the great composer's indelible contribution to opera. Audiences expressed great enthusiasm for the performances generally, with many singling out Coleman-Wright and the "humour and wit" of his entertaining commentary.

In Freddie De Tommaso: Il Tenore in Concert, award-winning and best-selling British-Italian tenor Freddie De Tommaso performed for the very first time in Australia in two very special recitals in Sydney and Melbourne, accompanied by Opera Australia pianist Kate Johnson.



A century since the great composer's passing: celebrating the music of Giacomo Puccini. Nicole Car, Young Woo Kim, and Orchestra Victoria in The Puccini Gala Concert. Photo: Jeff Busby



“A superb production, stimulating and exhausting in equal measures, and a brilliant realisation of the Hamlet story that was highly suggestive of the innovative future of opera.”

HAMLET AUDIENCE MEMBER

Opera Australia hit a new benchmark in 2024, performing four new Australian works – the most for a twelve-month period in our company’s history. Again, we acknowledge the contribution of former Artistic Director Jo Davies in achieving this milestone.

Making its Sydney debut in June was Australian director Neil Armfield’s highly praised operatic oratorio *Watershed: The Death of Dr Duncan*. Opera Australia’s searing production of song and dance starred Australian tenor Mark Oates and bass Pelham Andrews, dancer Macon Escobal Riley, and multidisciplinary performer Tomáš Kantor, supported by the OA Chorus and the OA Orchestra under the baton of Brett Weymark.

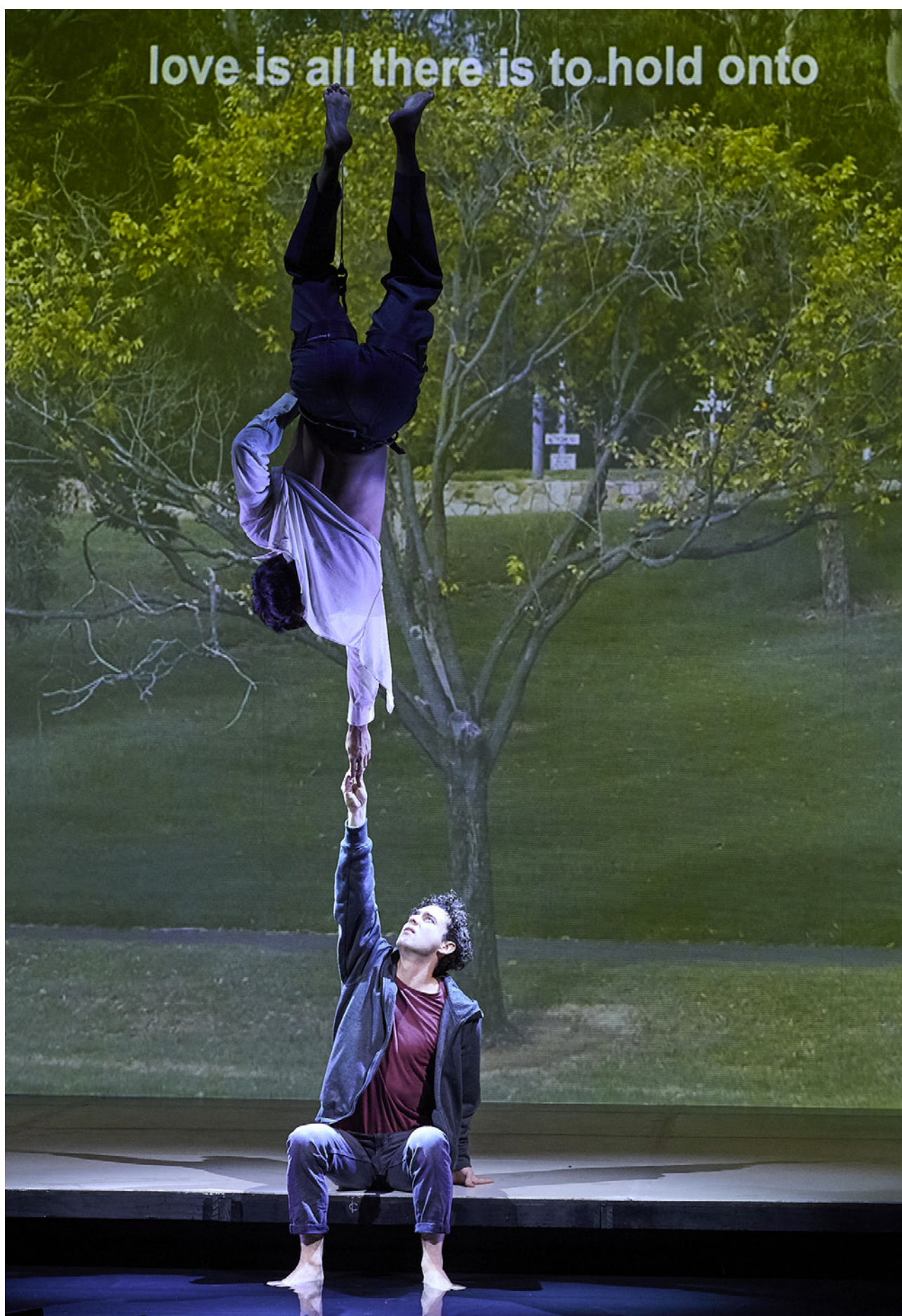
Watershed draws on the tragic real-life story of the 1972 drowning of University of Adelaide law lecturer Dr George Duncan, the apparent police cover-up and ensuing public scandal which ultimately paved the way to South Australia’s pioneering decriminalisation of homosexuality. The work’s transcendental

score written by Brisbane composer Joe Twist and powerful libretto crafted by acclaimed Australian author Christos Tsiolkas and playwright Alana Valentine – which won the pair the Australian Writer’s Guild Award for Musical Theatre in 2024 – invites audiences to reflect on the shocking events that lie at the heart of this history of gay rights in Australia.

Our production came at a timely moment, with 2024 marking 40 years since the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the State of NSW. The work was commissioned for Adelaide Festival by Rachel Healy and Armfield, who was the Festival’s Artistic Director from 2017 to 2022, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of Dr Duncan. Armfield expressed great pride in bringing the work to the OA stage in 2024, along with his production of *Hamlet*. Having first worked as a director at Opera Australia back in 1987, the veteran director feels a particular tie to Opera Australia: “I feel a part of this company,” he said. “It’s a company I love very much.”

Australian composer Brett Dean’s *Hamlet* is distinguished by being one of the most successful operas ever composed by an Australian. Directed by Armfield, the work premiered to great acclaim at the UK’s Glyndebourne Festival in 2017, before thrilling audiences at the Adelaide Festival, New York’s Metropolitan Opera, and most recently the Munich Opera Festival. In 2024, we were delighted to bring this powerful work to the Sydney Opera House for the first time. *Hamlet* creates an expansive world of sound, with monumental orchestra and chorus that bear down on the Danish prince’s troubled psyche. The destabilising effect is reinforced by Matthew Jocelyn’s libretto which reorganises and splits the text of Shakespeare’s play.

One of the most successful operas ever composed by an Australian: Brett Dean’s acclaimed *Hamlet* makes its Sydney Opera House debut with Allan Clayton reprising the title role. Here with Jud Arthur. Photo: Keith Saunders



Watershed: A thrillingly physical operatic oratorio featuring powerful choral music, solo voices, and dance, with Tomáš Kantor and Macon Escobal Riley.
Photo: Keith Saunders

Making his Australian debut was Anglo-German conductor Tim Anderson, who guided the accomplished OA Orchestra through Dean's raw and visceral score which features electronic music and immersive, surround-sound effects. One of the world's greatest tenors, Allan Clayton, reprised the title role in a tour-de-force performance, about which Dean told the *Sydney Morning Herald*: "I can't think of a more moving *Hamlet* than the way Allan actually portrays [him]." Performing alongside Clayton was award-winning Australian soprano Lorina Gore as the mesmerising Ophelia, with American baritone Rod Gilfry as Claudius, homegrown mezzo-soprano Catherine Carby as Gertude, and an exceptional local cast and the OA Chorus. The season was dedicated to the late Jacqueline Dark, the gifted mezzo-soprano who sadly passed away in 2023.

Celebrated Australian playwright and director Michael Gow directed Jonathan Mills' new opera *Eucalyptus* for its world premiere at Perth Concert Hall in February, before the production then headed east for performances at Brisbane Festival in September, and then in Melbourne at the Palais Theatre in October. Based on Murray Bail's 1998 novel of the same name and commissioned by Opera Australia and Victorian Opera, the opera was co-produced by Opera Australia, Victorian Opera, Perth Festival and Brisbane Festival, in association with West Australian Opera. Mills' mysterious and beguiling score coupled with a poetic and spare libretto by Meredith Oakes together weave an ageless yet quintessentially Australian story of love and longing, where dreams and the very landscape itself come alive.

As Mills said, "I want to explore a musical evocation of a chorus – both on and off-stage – singing the botanical names of all the different species of eucalyptus trees; not as a list of names to impress or confuse, to burden or bore, rather as the inspiration for the trees themselves, their unique hues and tones, textures and scents, becoming characters, or at least elements in an unfolding drama. A drama in which the idea, the symbolism, the mystery, and the wildness of a forest, an untamed natural landscape, becomes woven deeply into the storyline of the opera." The production starred Melbourne-based baritone Simon Meadows and South Australian soprano Desiree Frahn, with Opera Australia's Tahu Matheson conducting.

*"Fabulous drama.
Excellent new music.
Could not fault it.
I would like more new
music like this done
by Opera Australia."*

GILGAMESH AUDIENCE MEMBER

In September we performed our first collaboration with both Sydney Chamber Opera and Carriageworks, bringing Jack Symonds' bold new Australian opera *Gilgamesh* to Sydney audiences for its world premiere. Directed by the visionary Kip Williams, Symonds' contemporary adaptation of the world's oldest written epic poem, with libretto by Louis Garrick, tells the story of Gilgamesh, the tyrannical, ego-driven king of Mesopotamian mythology, who is given his comeuppance by angry Gods before ultimately redeeming himself by submitting to nature.

In composing the work, Symonds told the *Sydney Morning Herald*, he and Garrick "wanted to show [the poem's] modernity but not rule out any of the strange and fantastical elements." As an artform, Symonds said, opera offers a unique channel for communicating essential human qualities. "What opera does well," he commented, "is take the things that make us human and find extraordinary ways of rendering that."

The stunning Australian cast comprised bass baritone Jeremy Kleeman in the title role, alongside Mitchell Riley, Jane Sheldon, Jessica O'Donoghue, and Daniel Szesiong Todd. Presented in association with Ensemble Offspring and the Australian String Quartet, *Gilgamesh* was a thoroughly arresting, even visceral production, with costumes by David Fleischer, a massive open stage, and an inspired set by Elizabeth Gadsby featuring a dismembered tree and thousands of gold-painted leaves. Masterful lighting was provided by Amelia Lever-Davidson and sound by Benjamin Carey and Bob Scott.

"One of the principle joys of Eucalyptus the opera is the sheer beauty of Mills's music, its richness and colour; like Bail's prose, it shimmers and pulsates with the rhythms of the bush... It's Mills's most luminous achievement."

GUARDIAN AUSTRALIA



Opera Australia and Victorian Opera team up to co-present the world premiere of Sir Jonathan Mills' new commission, *Eucalyptus*, with South Australian soprano, Desiree Frahn. Photo: Charlie Kinross

In 2024, Sydney audiences were treated to Puccini's rarely-performed trio of one-act operas in our production of *Il Trittico*. The three operas are stand-alone works, with no connecting narrative between them and performances of the triptych tend to be overseen by a single director. But for this production, we shook up convention by assigning a different director to each work. The idea was the brainchild of now former OA Artistic Director Jo Davies, who appointed three exciting Australian directors to the roles: Constantine Costi, Imara Savage, and Shaun Rennie. All three paid tribute to Davies in having coined the idea – Costi described her as having “matchmade the trio.”

The opening work, *Il Tabarro*, directed by Costi, brought award-winning baritone Simon Meadows to the stage as barge-owner Michele, who is confronted with secrets, tensions, desire, and betrayal that culminates in murder. In *Suor Angelica*, directed by Savage, soprano Lauren Fagan made her OA debut in the title role as a woman forced into a cloister, where she confronts her turbulent past and ultimately experiences a profound religious redemption. Simon Meadows returned to the lead in the third of the operas, *Gianni Schicchi* directed by Rennie, a rollicking work of comedic chaos and unexpected twists based on an incident in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Appearing across the three operas and as Lauretta in the final work, Australian-Mauritian Stacey Alleaume performed the timeless, heart-rending aria ‘O mio babbino caro’.

The three directors of *Il Trittico* were encouraged to develop their work independently of each other, but deeply appreciated the experience of having one another on-hand to consult with and provide support. Costi praised the concept of appointing three directors to what he called “the bite-sized works” that make up *Il Trittico*. “It was great to be working alongside two other incredible directors and a really good way of showcasing three Australian directors,” Costi commented. The others agreed. “I had the best time,” said Rennie. “I was thrilled to be considered alongside Con and Imara, both of whom I’ve respected for years.” The experience of having three directors “felt like a little festival”, according to Savage. “I found it refreshing to have two other people around to discuss the work with,” she said.

The directors also paid tribute to the internationally-celebrated local cast and crew. In particular, they singled out designer Michael Hankin, who provided the essential glue between the operas. The talents of Lydia Yankovskaya, the dynamic young conductor who made her Sydney Opera House debut conducting the production, were also highlighted by the directors. Yankovskaya was key for pacing, Costi pointed out: “she knew when to push, and when to pull back across the night.”



Il Trittico showcased the work of three Australian directors, with Lauren Fagan performing *Suor Angelica*. Photo: Keith Saunders



Comic chaos: Gianni Schicchi from *Il Trittico*. Photo: Keith Saunders

“For young practitioners, opera is such an exciting theatrical palette to work with: you get this big orchestra and these big stories and often big design elements that you don’t get in the spoken theatre.”

CONSTANTINE COSTI, DIRECTOR, *IL TABARRO*

Rennie, Costi, and Savage have all worked with Opera Australia before, though not all of them in a leading director’s role. With a background in directing theatre and musical theatre, in recent years Rennie has assisted and revived several OA productions. *Gianni Schicchi* was the first full opera he has directed and it felt to Rennie like a sort of coming of age: “Five years ago I’d think ‘when I’m a grown-up, successful director – that’s when I’ll get to direct an opera’”. Costi, meanwhile, has had a longer association with Opera Australia, going back more than a decade. “I guess I’m maybe more of an opera baby,” he quipped, “in the sense that I started younger.” Savage’s background in opera is extensive, though much of her previous directing work has been focused on new or twentieth-century operas. For her, returning to Puccini was refreshing. Puccini “is very lyrical and story-based, and I hadn’t been in that world for a while,” she said.

As a collection, *Il Trittico* provides audiences with a unique opportunity to experience a range of operas in a single evening of entertainment. Each piece, Savage observed, is “a miniature – they’re so succinct.” Reflecting on the diversity of the three works, Savage said “it’s remarkable that it actually works as a trilogy.”

With three different directors handling the three operas, the richness and diversity were further intensified. “In *Trittico* productions that I’ve seen, when it’s one director across all three,” Costi said, “you get a sense of the ones that they really enjoyed doing and the ones they were less confident with – like who their favourite child was out of the three.” In this production, however, “we were just invested in one third each and were able to lean in deep into those worlds without having to worry about flexing different muscles across all three.”

The directors have high hopes for further engaging emerging creatives in Opera Australia. Rennie discerns “a shift even in the time that I’ve been working at OA in terms of the amount of young directors who are wanting to come in and start engaging with the artform.” Costi agreed: “for young practitioners, opera is such an exciting theatrical palette to work with: you get this big orchestra and these big stories and often big design elements that you don’t get in the spoken theatre.”



Love in a contemporary, working-class world: *Il Tabarro* from *Il Trittico*.
With Olivia Cranwell and Viktor Antipenko. Photo: Keith Saunders

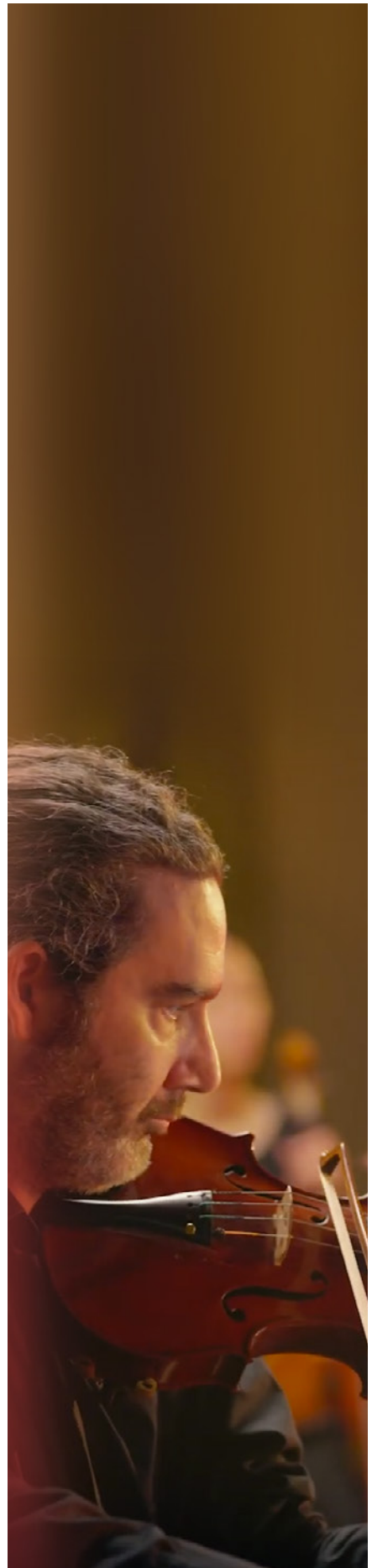
The Opera Australia Orchestra (OAO) can legitimately claim the mantle of Australia's most versatile orchestra. It's also one of the country's busiest. In 2024 alone the OAO played in 268 performances ranging across opera, musical theatre, and ballet – from operas like Gluck's early classical opera *Orpheus and Eurydice*, which premiered in 1762, and Brett Dean's new Australian work *Hamlet*, first performed in 2017, to productions for The Australian Ballet in Sydney, including Joby Talbot's cutting-edge score for the Sydney premiere of choreographer Christopher Wheeldon's *Oscar*, based on the life of Oscar Wilde. Each year the OAO also supports the IFAC Handa Australian Singing Competition, this year conducted by Tahu Matheson.

When our company performs in Victoria, we are fortunate to be able to rely on the vastly gifted Orchestra Victoria. In 2024, Orchestra Victoria was the instrumental force behind our productions of *Tosca* at Margaret Court Arena, *Breaking the Waves* and The Puccini Gala Concert at Hamer Hall, *Eucalyptus* at Palais Theatre, *The Magic Flute* at Geelong Arts Centre, and the BMW Opera for All free concert at Fed Square.

Every year, our Orchestra of immensely talented musicians performs a broad repertoire under the direction of an array of seasoned conductors, reaching the heights of artistic excellence. Familiarity does not necessarily mean a work is easier to play. For example, in 2024 the OAO performed *Così fan Tutte*, a musically challenging work requiring precise balance, technical ability, subtlety, and stamina. But with a challenge comes immense satisfaction, including for our 2024 Patricia H. Reid fellows, all of whom had the opportunity to play alongside our talented OAO experts in *Così*. Performing *Così fan Tutte* was among the Orchestra's highlights of 2024, as were *Hamlet* and *Idomeneo*.

In August we were delighted to welcome French violinist Matthieu Arama as Concertmaster after a worldwide search. Fresh from his role as Concertmaster of the orchestra of the Opéra National de Bordeaux, Arama has performed as guest and soloist with some of the most renowned conductors in the world and brings great depth of experience to this key role. Virginia Comerford, Principal Viola and Section Leader, expressed the ensemble's warm enthusiasm for the new Concertmaster. "We're very privileged, she said, "to have secured a player of Matthieu's experience and calibre."

As 2024 drew to a close, the Orchestra farewelled two long-serving members: Virginia Blunt (Tutti Violin) and Allan Watson (Associate Principal Timpani and Tutti Percussion). Combined, Blunt and Watson played for a remarkable 75 years in the Orchestra. Also farewelled was Josh Clarke after 17 years as Principal Trumpet. But it was not just goodbyes: the Orchestra also welcomed new violinists Jing Lin and Dominic Azzi (both 2022 OA Patricia H. Reid Orchestral Fellows) to the violin section; Ruben Palma to the cello section; and Lisa Osmialowski as Associate Principal Flute.



French violinist and new Opera Australia Orchestra Concertmaster Matthieu Arama performing Intermezzo from *Carmen* for a recording at Trackdown Studios in December. Photo: supplied



“Our Orchestra is known to be so responsive, it can turn on the twitch of a conductor’s nose.”

EMMA IN DER MAUR,
HEAD OF ORCHESTRA MANAGEMENT

Australia’s Most Versatile Orchestra

The Opera Australia Orchestra is tightly knit and highly skilled – it has to be. With 45 full-time, salaried musicians, a major strength of the Orchestra is its experience. Among the long-serving, tenured instrumentalists are Virginia Comerford and Andrew Meisel, Associate Principal Double Bass. When asked what’s special about the Orchestra, Comerford pinpoints “the personal and the artistic”. “There’s a real camaraderie,” she enthuses. “We know the challenges and it’s all about doing what it takes to get the show on the road.” On the artistic side, Comerford remarks, “we’re an orchestra that has this sort of ‘corporate knowledge’ of the major repertoire and so we’re able to prepare works quickly.”

This deep knowledge is critical for every performance, with the players needing to be responsive to the slightest shift coming from the stage. “If a conductor wants something in particular we’re all aware because we’re listening really closely,” Comerford explains.

“The singers can be doing something different every single night for a variety of reasons. And similarly in the Australian Ballet, dancers can hold positions longer, and we have to be constantly on the edge of our seats.” Meisel, who has been in the OAO for 31 years, agrees. In any performance, the Orchestra has to respond and adapt to the rhythms of the singers. “It can vary on any given night,” he says. Within the Orchestra, “there’s a huge amount of trust and respect”.

In addition to being well rehearsed, the OAO is also highly responsive. Bringing Brett Dean’s *Hamlet* to audiences in Sydney for the first time set the bar high for our well-seasoned musicians. Comerford laughs as she describes Dean’s work as “an absolute beast.” “The complexity of the score really challenged us,” she admits. But not only are our musicians amply up to such challenges, they’re also up for them, relishing the opportunity to push themselves ever further. “These pieces really keep us at the top of our game and keep our skills alive,” says Comerford. “Performing *Hamlet* was like doing five maths tests every night!”

PERFORMING FRONT AND CENTRE

Providing indispensable support to Orchestra members are the logistics and administrative staff, including Head of Orchestra Management Emma In der Maur, Deputy Orchestra Managers Andrew Collins and Stevan Pavlovic, and Orchestra Production Manager Rhonda Jones. "Our Orchestra is known to be so responsive," says In der Maur, "it can turn on the twitch of a conductor's nose. This is in part because of our extensive collaboration over many seasons with Sydney's finest freelance musicians who complete the orchestra each night." Jones looks after the physical side of the Orchestra. "It's my job to make sure that the Orchestra players have everything they need to do their job," she explains. Jones is nothing if not dedicated. "I actually refer to them sometimes as my family because I spend more time with them than I do with anyone else." It's a level of attention that the members of the Orchestra deeply appreciate. During rehearsals and ahead of a performance, Meisel reports, "Rhonda will always make the effort to come up to see if we're comfortable and everything's alright. That's pretty spectacular – it's not many people that do that and I haven't seen that in any other orchestra."

The Opera Australia Orchestra is also distinguished by being one of only two pit orchestras in Australia, with most other orchestras performing on stage. The Sydney Opera House pit, Comerford notes, is "a very challenging performance space." It demands a particular discipline, focus, and acoustic arrangements, with Jones regularly publishing pit plans and risk assessments. "You have to be fully engaged," Comerford says. The intense level of focus and attention required appeals to Meisel: "I find that it's kind of addictive in a funny sort of way". Performing in the pit means being less immediately visible to the audience, but that doesn't mean the pressure is off. "We're not the star attraction like a symphony orchestra is on stage," acknowledges Comerford. "But from our point of view," she observes, "we can't afford to drop the ball at all or it can have a ripple effect; one small thing can affect a whole section."

Ultimately, what counts most for the Orchestra is the music. Says Meisel, "When we perform and you see someone in the front row that's so engaged and moved to tears, my job is done."

West Side Story

West Side Story opened to a full house when it returned in March to the open-air stage at Mrs Macquaries Point, where the gritty streets of New York City were set against the glittering backdrop of Sydney Harbour. Over four dazzling weeks, the spirited tale of feuding gangs and star-crossed lovers was performed under the stars for the 2024 Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour (HOSH).

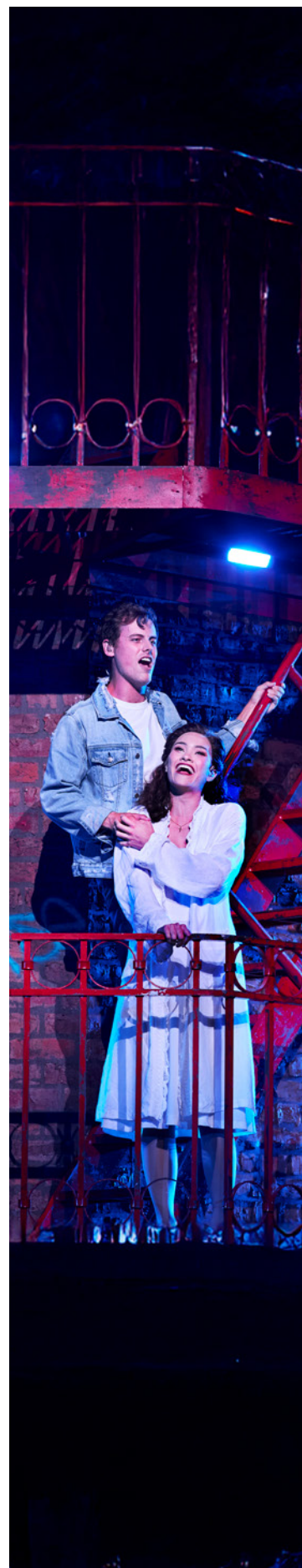
Directed by opera and musical theatre great Francesca Zambello, 44 cast members drawn from across Australia and further afield – from Alice Springs to Adelaide, from the Gold Coast to Melbourne, and one international cast member from the United States – took command of the unique over-water stage in a spectacular performance of Bernstein and Sondheim’s music and lyrics, and athletic choreography by Jerome Robbins. Brian Thomson’s spectacular set, which featured a graffitied apartment block with fire escape, three full-size subway cars, and a 1950s drug store, won critics’ praise – *Arts Hub* declared it “a star in its own right”. Costume designer Jennifer Irwin powerfully conveyed the gang tensions by dressing the Jets in blue and green, and the Sharks in stand-out reds and oranges.

The singing and dancing cast was a showcase of emerging talent, headed by First Nations soprano Nina Korbe, a proud Koa, Kuku Yalanji, Wakka Wakka woman, making her professional debut in the role of Maria. For Korbe, playing the role brought with it a sense of honour but also great responsibility. “I think what’s so beautiful about Maria,” the young singer told SBS TV, “is the story that is told through her is one of adversity and feeling a little bit like an outsider, which is something that I think many First Nations people all over the world can resonate with”. Canberra-born Billy Bouchier delivered a powerful performance as former Jets leader, Tony. Newcastle-born Patrick Whitbread and Gold Coast local Kimberley Hodgson delighted as Riff and Anita, while Broadway performer Manuel Stark Santos made his Australian debut in the role of hot-headed Sharks gang leader, Bernardo.

The smash-hit musical bowled audiences over, with the cast, crew, and HOSH orchestra given rapturous applause and the on-stage chemistry of the two leads leaving audiences spellbound – *Guardian Australia* reported that from the very first moment Tony and Maria locked eyes “it felt like falling in love for the first time.”

“It’s as if every other performance of West Side Story you’ve seen was in black and white, whilst this one was in full technicolour. Such was the intensity of the brilliance of so many aspects of this production that it felt fresh and more detailed than any I have watched before.”

STAGE WHISPERS



Sunset Boulevard

Our newly-imagined production of Andrew Lloyd Webber's Tony Award-winning *Sunset Boulevard* marked the musical's first return to this country after almost three decades. Premiering in Melbourne at the Princess Theatre in May, the production then opened at the Sydney Opera House in August.

The role of Norma Desmond, the desperate, faded Hollywood legend, was performed by Sarah Brightman, with Silvie Paladino covering and receiving an instant standing ovation at the end of her opening performance. Tim Draxl enthralled audiences as Joe Gillis, the ambitious Hollywood screenwriter whose chance encounter with Desmond develops into a passionate and explosive relationship with tragic consequences. Robert Grubb delivered a powerful performance as Desmond's house servant Max Von Mayerling, while Ashleigh Rubenach impressed audiences and critics as Hollywood go-getter Betty Schaefer, earning herself a nomination for

Best Performance in a Supporting Role in a Musical in the 2024 Sydney Theatre Awards.

Draxl's stellar performance won him a nomination for the Judith Johnson Award for Best Performance in a Leading Role in a Musical at the 2024 Sydney Theatre Awards. For Draxl, whose career as an actor and singer spans more than two decades, getting to play the role of Joe Gillis was "a definite career highlight." He warmly praised the rest of the team, saying that "this company and creative team are second to none and I pinch myself every day that I get to embark on this journey with them."

The spectacular production delighted audiences in Singapore, again with Sarah Brightman alongside Tim Draxl, Ashleigh Rubenach, and Robert Grubb, supported by an outstanding Australian company. In late March *Sunset Boulevard* went on to premiere in Beijing, followed by Shanghai, Wuhan, and Shenzhen. We're proud to be showcasing the talents of Australian artists on the international stage.



Evoking the glamorous Golden Age of Hollywood, *Sunset Boulevard* starred Sarah Brightman, with Tim Draxl and stage-and-screen veteran, Robert Grubb. Photo: Daniel Boud

NURTURING AND SUPPORTING YOUNG ARTISTS



Opera Australia has a long history of training the next generation of talent, with many former young artists regularly performing with our company each season.

In 2024, with the generous support of Principal Patron, Maureen Wheeler AO, we established our highly anticipated renewed Young Artist Program. The scheme stands on the shoulders of the former programs introduced by Moffatt Oxenbould, committing our company to the future of opera in Australia. Emerging artists are integral to our mission to present great opera for the 21st century through a uniquely Australian lens.

A national audition tour in November identified 17 finalists to attend a final audition and professional development workshop over three days in Sydney in December. These national auditions were conducted in person, with the Opera Australia panel travelling to Perth, Adelaide,

Melbourne, Brisbane, and Sydney. Our state opera company colleagues hosted the auditions, and the respective Artistic Directors and Heads of Music joined the panel. We also created time for a few general auditions in each city, which were warmly received by both artists and companies. From 118 initial applicants, 59 were selected for a callback to the second round. Finalists received individual and group coaching, classes with industry professionals, and opportunities to perform and direct OA principal artists.

Young artists are also supported through The George and Nerissa Johnson Memorial Scholarship Bequest, which provides performing artists the opportunity for overseas study and professional development for up to eight weeks, and the Patricia H. Reid Orchestral Fellowship, an annual professional development program for exceptional, early career string musicians.

Our new Young Artist Program: Honing their craft under the guidance of some of the most esteemed names in the opera world: (L-R) Elias Wilson, Chelsea Burns, Leon Vitogiannis, Claudia Osborne, Jem Herbert, and Shikara Ringdahl. Photo: Neil Bennett

“Sherman Lowe, an American vocal teacher and pedagogue, has been based in Italy for over 30 years. He helped me to revisit fundamental concepts of the voice and body in order to maintain vocal health and to sing on the finer edge of the vocal folds for maximum elasticity and vibrancy. I continue to find his instruction invaluable as a balancing exercise, particularly when incorporating greater weight in the sound for more demanding repertoire, such as Puccini.”

MAIA ANDREWS, GEORGE AND NERISSA JOHNSON
MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP BEQUEST RECIPIENT

After careful deliberation, we appointed six young artists: Chelsea Burns, soprano (WA); Shikara Ringdahl, mezzo-soprano (QLD); Elias Wilson, tenor (NSW); Leon Vitogiannis, baritone (NSW); Jem Herbert, répétiteur (VIC); and Claudia Osborne, director (NSW).

The six young artists, with diverse backgrounds ranging from Chinese Australian and First Nations to Greek Australian, are now undertaking the most comprehensive training available to emerging artists in Australia – an intensive, fully paid 18-month journey of development, honing their craft under the guidance of some of the most esteemed names in the opera world. The primary goal of the program is to develop the skills necessary for a modern career in opera.

Opera Australia's Dr Francis Greep, Head of Young Artists, and Young Artist Program Producer Jane Hennessy are building a holistic program that includes singing, acting, dance, yoga, nutrition, psychology and wellbeing sessions, finance and legal literacy, marketing and social media, costuming, makeup and wigs. All are complemented by language and repertoire intensives in German, French, Italian, Russian, and contemporary music.

Opera Australia was also delighted to cast our 2023 Young Artists in 2024 productions, including Sophie Salvesani and Petah Cavallaro in *La Traviata*; Danita Weatherstone in *The Magic Flute* (Sydney Summer season) and *La Bohème* (National Tour); Esther Song in *The Magic Flute* (Sydney Summer season and Geelong Arts Centre); and Andrew Williams in *La Bohème* (National Tour).

2025/26 Opera Australia Young Artists:

Chelsea Burns, soprano
Shikara Ringdahl, mezzo-soprano
Elias Wilson, tenor
Leon Vitogiannis, baritone
Jem Herbert, répétiteur
Claudia Osborne, director

2024 OA TRAINING PROGRAM RECIPIENTS:

Patricia H. Reid Fellows:

Nadia Barrow, cello
Lucy Clarke-Randazzo, violin
Catherine Jang, violin
Nicole Kim, violin

George and Nerissa Johnson Memorial Scholarship Bequest recipients:

Maia Andrews, soprano
Bronwyn Douglass, soprano
Angela Hogan, mezzo-soprano
Su Choung, répétiteur
Gavin Brown, tenor
Danita Weatherstone, soprano

The Aotearoa New Zealand Opera Studio (TANZOS)

In July we continued our connection with the opera sector in Aotearoa New Zealand. At The Opera Centre and Sydney Opera House six voice students from The Aotearoa New Zealand Opera Studio at the University of Waikato experienced a two-week residency. During this time, they were led by Madeleine Pierard, Program Director (and former Young Artist with The Royal Opera, Covent Garden) and Dame Malvina, Major Chair in Opera. The students observed studio and stage rehearsals, participated in coaching sessions and workshops, and attended performances, including a *Tosca* rehearsal. The students also enjoyed a walk-on on the Joan Sutherland stage performing 'Waiata: Wai o te rangi' ('Water of the Sky') written by Katherine Winitana and Ashleigh Berryman for Te Pae Kōkako – The Aotearoa New Zealand Opera Studio (TANZOS).

TANZOS students:

Jordon Fonoti-Fuimaono, tenor
Jasmine Jeesen, soprano
Samuel McKeever, bass-baritone
Ridge Ponini, tenor
Taylor Wallbank, tenor
Katherine Winitana, soprano

**“I. FEEL. SO.
WELCOME. HERE!!!!!!”**

TANZOS OPERA AUSTRALIA
RESIDENCY STUDENT

AUDIENCE



Audience at the opening night of *The Magic Flute*, Geelong Arts Centre. Photo: Peter Foster



362,430

TOTAL
ATTENDEES



64.4%

FIRST-TIME
OPERA AUSTRALIA
PURCHASERS
(OPERA)



62.7%

FIRST-TIME
OPERA AUSTRALIA
PURCHASERS
(MUSICAL THEATRE)

DIGITAL AUDIENCE



FOLLOWERS:
14,460
GROWTH:
12%



FOLLOWERS:
15,500
GROWTH:
7.4%



FOLLOWERS:
47,983
GROWTH:
16.1%



FOLLOWERS:
90,327
GROWTH:
4.6%



TOTAL FOLLOWERS:
201,847
TOTAL GROWTH:
6.8%

AUDIENCES: TOP TEN OUTSIDE AUSTRALIA



1

USA



2

UNITED
KINGDOM



3

GERMANY



4

SOUTH
KOREA



5

NEW
ZEALAND



6

CHINA



7

CANADA



8

JAPAN



9

TAIWAN



10

FRANCE

Opera Australia has made significant strides in the past 24 months, maintaining and developing our audiences through a comprehensive, data-driven approach. By implementing strategic initiatives based on deep audience understanding, we are navigating the challenging landscape of rising production costs and reduced discretionary spending.

We have already seen strong results from our commitment to valuing audiences. In 2023, as part of the most comprehensive audience research and segmentation project in our history, we identified six types of existing audiences and two groups of potential audiences who are 'culturally curious' and open to opera but not yet attending performances.

Our research, which combined both behavioural transaction data and ethnographic studies, found segments of our audience who:

- Have high levels of passion for opera as a rich artform and have the highest level of attendance frequency. These are also our long-tenure subscribers.
- Are opera traditionalists and who look forward to attending opera performances for fun and relaxation. Tend towards long-tenure subscribers but include high volume single-ticket buyers.
- Are fun-seeking, social event-goers looking for shared experiences and a great night out. They see a range of arts and culture, including opera on a semi-regular basis. These are mostly single-ticket purchasers.
- See opera as a way to challenge and educate themselves. They are looking to connect with the arts community and attend a broad range of genres and event types, but presently skew to more popular titles.
- Are experience-led, looking for new and different cultural offerings. They are not attendees of traditional opera in traditional settings, but willing to give interesting things a go if cost is not prohibitive.
- Are one-time attendees to OA opera with a strong international tourist and regional/intrastate contingent. Our performances at Sydney Opera House are a major drawcard. They are still motivated to attend opera to nourish their creative side and broaden their understanding of the world.

Our 'culturally curious' growth audiences include:

- Younger people who are culturally engaged but are time-poor due to life stage. Open to opera, but not currently engaging, they include a high proportion of families.
- Young people who are curious and openminded about cultural events and who have a strong positive perception of opera, but have low disposable income and don't currently attend.

By understanding each group of audiences' motivations, barriers to attendance, and genre preferences, our programming team can make informed decisions that mitigate risks while maintaining artistic integrity. Our aim is that through strategic programming we will create pathways for repeat audience attendance and drive loyalty.



GROWING AUDIENCES

Important first experiences of opera

We believe that opera is for everyone, which is why we want to make it more accessible for younger audiences. In 2024 we introduced our Under 35s Program, which saw 4,726 young people sign up for a free membership in answer to our question “have you ever wanted to give opera a try?” The program offers heavily discounted tickets and behind-the-scenes opportunities. Interested to learn more about opera, a group of Under-35 members were invited to attend a *Così fan Tutte* sitzprobe to get an exciting glimpse into how an opera comes together and gain a deeper appreciation of the artform.

Our collaborative approach with other arts organisations and communities has deepened our engagement with diverse audiences. Examples include our *Orpheus and Eurydice* collaboration with Opera Queensland, Sydney Festival, and Circa; *Opera Up Late* and *Watershed*’s marketing partnership with Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and LGBTQ+ communities. Similarly, *Gilgamesh* at Carriageworks assisted in our efforts to develop our audiences. These partnerships help us build trust and relevance within diverse communities, creating genuine, meaningful relationships based on understanding their needs, aspirations, and cultural preferences.

By thoughtfully guiding new and infrequent attendees to join our longstanding devotees in a love of opera, we’re building audiences amid the evolving challenges of the arts sector. Coupled with our balanced approach to programming – mixing works of broad appeal with more challenging pieces – we’re aiming for a sustainable model that achieves artistic excellence and financial viability.

“Our 2024 audience research shows that across all our existing segments, on average, first opera experiences were under the age of 30. This indicates that an early experience of opera is key to the development of a longstanding relationship with the artform, and why access programs such as the Under 35s scheme are vital to Opera Australia’s sustainability.”

SIMON MEILAK,
MARKETING AND
COMMUNICATIONS
DIRECTOR



Interval during *Tosca* at Margaret Court Arena: Newly-signed Under 35s Program members enjoy access to \$35 tickets to attend the Australian premiere of Edward Dick’s acclaimed Opera North production. Photo: supplied

“By removing financial barriers, we have opened the door to thousands of attendees, including cross-generational families, to enjoy listening to a selection of opera arias performed by four of Opera Australia’s finest singers.”

WOLFGANG BUECHEL,
CEO OF BMW GROUP AUSTRALIA

In early February, an enthusiastic audience of over three thousand people – young and old, from opera-going regulars to many new to the artform – braved the afternoon heat to come out in force to delight in the enchanting music of our 2024 BMW Opera for All free concert in Melbourne’s Federation Square. The outdoor concert featured four of Opera Australia’s finest singers – soprano Olivia Cranwell, mezzo-soprano Dimity Shepherd, tenor Shanul Sharma, and baritone Simon Meadows – and Orchestra Victoria’s talented instrumentalists for an hour of popular arias, peppered with insightful commentary from esteemed conductor Brian Castles-Onion AM.

The BMW Opera for All concert is a strong corporate partnership for Opera Australia. It’s also an important component of our commitment to bringing opera to wider audiences and is fast proving itself to be a must-see event in our Victorian calendar. Building on the success of the inaugural event in 2023, Melbourne’s open-air concert was an early highlight of our 2024 Victorian season which kicked off in May with *Tosca* at Margaret Court Arena and *Sunset Boulevard* at the Princess Theatre.

Part of a global initiative that brings BMW into collaboration with local opera companies to deliver outstanding cultural experiences to a wide public for free, the BMW Opera for All events take place annually in various international cities, including London, Munich, and Berlin.

Following the 2025 staging of the event, Wolfgang Buechel, CEO of BMW Group Australia, expressed the company’s dedication to supporting art and culture as part of its social community strategy. “For three consecutive years, we’ve partnered with Opera Australia to host the BMW Opera for All concert at Melbourne’s Fed Square,” he said. “As part of BMW’s global concert series, celebrated in multiple cities worldwide, this free event has brought exceptional cultural performances to diverse audiences at no cost. By removing financial barriers, we have opened the door to thousands of attendees, including cross-generational families, to enjoy listening to a selection of opera arias performed by four of Opera Australia’s finest singers.”



A stellar line-up of Australian opera singers perform in the free BMW Opera for All concert, Fed Square, Melbourne.
Pictured: Soprano Olivia Cranwell and mezzo-soprano Dimity Shepherd. Photo: Andrew Hobbs Photography



Puccini's *La Bohème*, presented in partnership with our Opera Conference colleagues, got a funky revamp in award-winning director Dean Bryant's new production for our 2024 National Tour. Bryant brought his characteristic insight and energy to the new staging, working with set and costume designer Isabel Hudson and lighting designer Damien Cooper, to bring the tragic love story of Mimi and Rodolfo and their bohemian friends in Paris forward in time from the 1890s to the 1970s. Transposing the story into the more contemporary context of the 1970s provided a way of connecting Puccini's romantic classic to present-day audiences. As Bryant explained, "The 70s feels far enough away to have an aesthetic that looks gorgeous, but not so distant that it feels like the 'olden days'." As the then-CEO of Opera Australia Fiona Allan shared with the company, the production's threadbare sofa and crocheted granny-blanket evoked the familiar grunge of today's share-houses.

Distilled to a chamber version, Bryant's production captured the giddy experience of youth, where life seems to spread out indefinitely, and the challenges for the young artist, confronted with material hurdles at every turn. The plight of the struggling young artist is an experience close to the director's heart, having started out as one at drama school, along with his partner. Together they aspired to the creative life: "I wanted to direct, he wanted to compose," Bryant recalled. But the pathways weren't easy: "The first years out of drama school were tough," he said, "watching the ATM balance hover around zero just before payday. But even though we were poor, it never felt that way. We felt excited by the possibilities of the things we were going to make." In the end, after all the uncertainty, Bryant and his partner realised their dream: "We kept writing, and we kept working, and we kept struggling and eventually the work we made found an audience."

A cast of exceptional Opera Australia singers and musicians breathe fresh life into one of the world's favourite operas: John Longmuir as Rodolfo, Danita Weatherstone as Mimi, Andrew Williams as Marcello, Michael Lampard as Schaunard, Cathy-Di Zhang as Musetta, Shane Lowrence as Colline, Eugene Raggio as Alcindoro and cast in *La Bohème*. Photo: Jeff Busby

TOURING NATIONALLY

Making productions resonate is always important for our company, but particularly so for the National Tour which is dedicated to bringing world-class live opera performances to audiences in regional and remote locations. In July *La Bohème* made its first stop on the National Tour at Dandenong, performing at the Drum Theatre before travelling onto performances across Victoria, New South Wales, and Tasmania. Among the venues on the itinerary was the Victorian town of Shepparton – just an hour away from the farm Bryant had grown up on. Reflecting back on his childhood, Bryant remarked that back then he “never would have even thought it possible to see an opera by the leading company in Australia”.

Each year, an essential part of the National Tour, supported by a 12-piece orchestra, is the active participation of local youngsters as the Regional Children’s Chorus in each of the tour locations. Children’s Chorus Master Su Choung worked with choirs based in each town ahead of the students’ participation in cast rehearsals before taking to the stage. For many children, this was their first taste of performing in front of an audience. Others had had some previous experience in Opera Australia productions. Such was the case, for instance, for performances in Dandenong, where the production worked with 13 students from the Keerthana Music School, a specialist Indian Carnatic music school. The children from Keerthana, led by Uthra Vijay, were warmly welcomed back for a cross-cultural collaboration with the Indian-Australian community that is of ongoing importance to our company.

For Bryant, a core challenge of any National Tour production – its transportability – is also one of its major rewards. “The constraints mean you must focus on what is critical – the voices and the relationships between our main characters. We must harness imagination, the most powerful resource in live performance.”

“Much like the characters in the show, the tour is huge in spirit – it has to be to get in and out of all the venues we visit across the country.”

DEAN BRYANT,
DIRECTOR, *LA BOHÈME*



A new 70s-inspired production of Puccini’s *La Bohème* travels more than 5,000 kilometres across Victoria, New South Wales, and Tasmania. Pictured: Local youngsters as the Regional Children’s Chorus. Photo: Jeff Busby

At Opera Australia, we want to reduce barriers and invite people from all backgrounds to experience the transformative power of opera alongside our aficionados, making this rich cultural experience accessible to everyone.

In 2024, we continued to implement several initiatives to open opera up to all and increase community engagement. Our commitment to accessibility and affordability manifested through innovative programs and performances designed to welcome new audiences and remove traditional obstacles to enjoying our artform.

Opera for under \$100

Understanding the current cost of living pressures on households, we aimed to provide opera tickets at price points that appealed to as many people as possible. In 2024, we were pleased that 42 per cent of our tickets were priced at less than \$100.

Free Opera in the Community

In February, we performed the BMW Opera for All series at Melbourne's Fed Square. This free concert series, an international tradition of BMW celebrated in multiple cities worldwide, brought an exceptional cultural performance to diverse audiences at no cost. By removing financial barriers, we opened the door for over 3,000 people, including cross-generational families, to enjoy a sunny Melbourne afternoon of exquisite arias.

EXPANDING ACCESSIBILITY THROUGH TARGETED PROGRAMS

Under 35s Program

In 2024 we launched our Under 35s Program with a singular vision: to make opera more accessible, engaging, and affordable for younger audiences. By offering free membership, significant ticket discounts, and unique behind-the-scenes experiences, we aimed to cultivate a new generation of opera enthusiasts.

In our inaugural year, we registered over 4,726 young people interested in experiencing opera, with 1,110 tickets purchased as we launched the program. This represents a significant milestone in our mission to democratise opera and attract younger audiences to our artform.

In May, 500 tickets for the special price of \$35 were offered to celebrate the launch of the program. The initiative commenced in Melbourne with the

Australian premiere of Edward Dick's award-winning production of *Tosca* – the first opera ever to be performed at Margaret Court Arena – and extended to the Sydney season when the production opened in June at the Sydney Opera House.

To ensure financial accessibility, Under 35 members benefited from a consistent 15 per cent discount on most opera performances. Additional savings included special heavily-discounted ticket opportunities, and companion tickets enabled members to bring an Under 35s friend at the same discounted rate, further enhancing accessibility.

The success of our Under 35s program demonstrates that opera can indeed be for everyone. We are committed to continuing to break down barriers, create engaging experiences, and nurture a lifelong love of opera among younger generations.

The Susan & Isaac Wakil Foundation Access Program

We are very grateful for the opportunity through the Susan & Isaac Wakil Foundation to provide people who would not otherwise have access to opera the opportunity to attend our performances at the Sydney Opera House and Arts Centre Melbourne through the provision of heavily-subsidised tickets.

In 2024 we provided \$20 tickets via a ballot system to 1,951 individuals who might otherwise be unable to attend to experience world-class opera performances.

Other Initiatives

In addition to targeted programs, we also designed multiple entry points for opera-curious individuals:

- Student Rush tickets at \$35 made performances accessible to 3,032 students. These included *Tosca*, *Così fan Tutte* and *Hamlet* at the Sydney Opera House
- TodayTix Rush offerings saw 8,139 accessible tickets purchased.
- Under-30s Subscription packages offered a substantial 30 per cent discount, further lowering financial barriers.
- Our Dinner on Us promotion for select performances was taken up by 3,148 people who enjoyed a performance at the Sydney Opera House plus dinner on us.

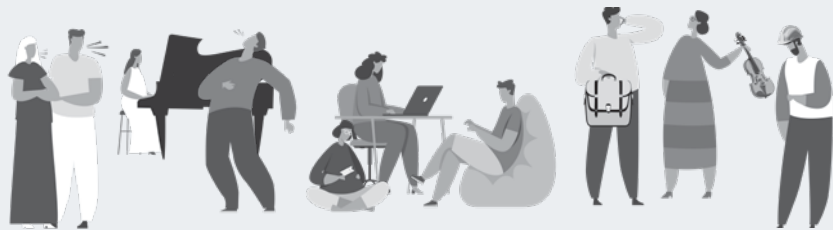
Our accessibility efforts yielded impressive outcomes: over 64 per cent of our opera and 63 per cent of our musical theatre audiences were first-time attendees.

COMPANY



About to make their entrance on the Joan Sutherland Theatre stage, *Hamlet* choristers:
(L-R) Katherine Wiles, Malcolm Ede, Kathryn Williams, Anthony Mackey, Laura Scandizzo, and Clifford Plumpton.
Photo: supplied

EMPLOYEES



TOTAL EMPLOYEES

1,295



ARTISTS AND MUSICIANS

53.2%



AUSTRALIANS IN KEY ROLES
(CAST AND CONDUCTORS)

87.3%



TECHNICAL

32.2%



ADMINISTRATIVE
AND MANAGEMENT

9.96%



PRODUCING AND
ARTISTIC MANAGEMENT

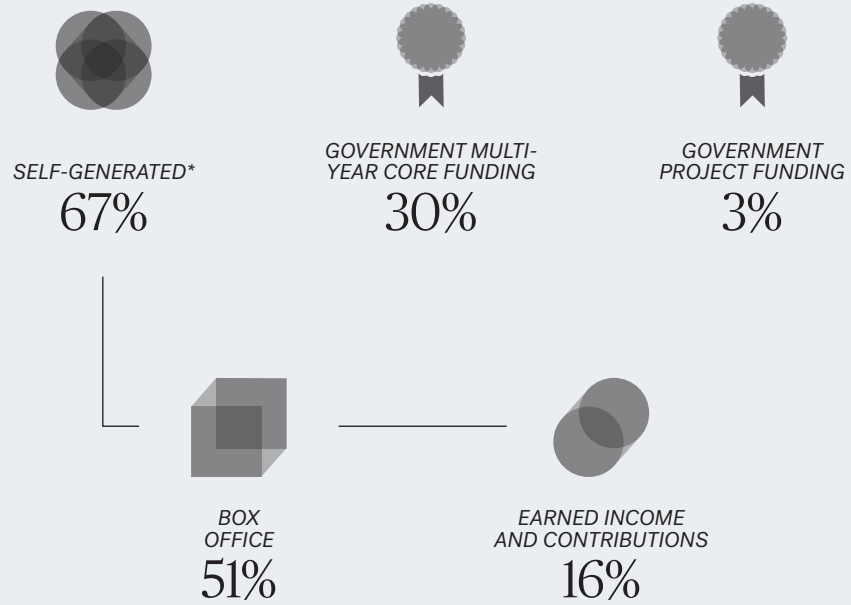
4.56%



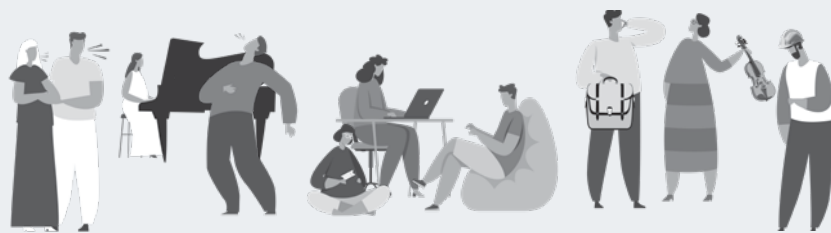
YOUNG ARTISTS SUPPORTED:
SCHOLARSHIPS, FELLOWSHIPS AND RESIDENCIES

27


REVENUE



EXPENDITURE




ARTISTS AND STAFF
55%



PRODUCTION COSTS
30%



MARKETING AND PROMOTION
10%



ADMINISTRATION
5%

OUR STRATEGIC AMBITION

Opera Australia is one of the country's most important cultural institutions. Committed to artistic excellence, national reach, and cultural leadership, our company plays a vital role in Australia's performing arts landscape and in the lives of audiences nationwide. Our **strategy** outlines our ambition to nurture and extend our artform, our audience and our company to ensure Opera Australia remains vibrant and sustainable in the future, balancing commercial imperatives with artistic excellence and community participation.

OA commissions and supports new Australian work, including First Nations stories. We are bringing exceptional Australian talent home to perform with our company, and we have renewed our Young Artist Program to further nurture homegrown talent. We are doing this while we continue to bring to Australia exciting international guest artists.

We are also creating clearer educational and professional pathways for emerging artists, and opening up opera in communities to ensure the next generation of artists and audiences can continue to connect into the future. And, through collaborative partnerships with local and global opera companies and arts organisations, we are showcasing Australian creative excellence on our stages.

In today's world, issues like gender equality and diversity are central to social discourse. Opera Australia's Gender Pay Gap for 2023-2024, as reported by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, is 2.8 per cent which is an outstanding result when benchmarked across not only the Creative and Performing Arts Activities category, but all categories. However, we acknowledge that there is still more to be done within our company, and we continue to work towards a more diverse workforce both on and off the stage.

Opera Australia has four enterprise agreements (EAs) covering Orchestra, Performers and Music Staff, Technical Staff, and Non-Repertory Production Staff for the period 1 February 2024 to 31 January 2025. These EAs resulted from the first stage of a two-stage process that commenced in 2023. Stage 2 Interest-based Bargaining progressed during 2024. Stage 2 has been characterised by meaningful, detailed, and productive bargaining, which focused on aligning EA terms and conditions to OA's evolving operational requirements and strategic objectives. The EA negotiations are well advanced. The company is optimistic that negotiations will conclude in the near future and result in three-year EAs in place until February 2028. The Interest-based Bargaining framework, implemented by the company for the first time, has been rewarding, with a high level of collaboration, transparency and trust throughout the process.

OUR STRATEGIC AMBITION

In the global opera arena, Opera Australia was represented at the World Opera Forum 2024 by then-Artistic Director Jo Davies. Opera America welcomed the international opera community to Los Angeles for a week-long, global gathering of opera administrators, artists, trustees, and advocates. Jo participated in the conversation, "What we produce, how we produce it, and for whom." The Forum and Conference focused leaders on making a case for our global artform in the 21st century: while the experience of opera varies from region to region, the challenges and opportunities presented today to opera performers, administrators, and audiences are increasingly converging.

Opera Australia is also proud to foster meaningful diplomatic connections across countries. Throughout the year, at our Sydney Opera House performances, we hosted distinguished leaders from the Indo-Pacific region visiting Australia as part of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Canberra Fellowship Program. In October, representing Opera Australia, Jin Tea Kim, our longest-serving member of the Chorus, was honoured to be one of six artists to greet Their Majesties King Charles III and Queen Camilla as they arrived at our Sydney performance home. And, ahead of our staging of *Rusalka* in 2025, in December our then-CEO Fiona Allan was thrilled to lead a tour of the Sydney Opera House for His Excellency Mr Petr Pavel, President of the Czech Republic during his visit to Australia. Accompanying him was Ms Eva Pavlová, First Lady of the Czech Republic, and Her Excellency Ms Jana Tyrer, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Australia. Our diplomatic engagements underscore the vital role that cultural exchange plays in maintaining Australia's international relationships and understanding between nations.



Opera Australia hosts the President of the Czech Republic on a tour of the Sydney Opera House ahead of the staging of *Rusalka* in 2025: (L-R) H.E. Ms Jana Tyrer, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Australia; Fiona Allan, then-CEO of Opera Australia; Kya Blondin, then-Acting CEO of Sydney Opera House; Ms Eva Pavlová, First Lady of the Czech Republic; H.E. Mr Petr Pavel, President of the Czech Republic; Natalie Aroyan, Opera Australia soprano; and Rebecca Kitelinger, Opera Australia Director of Development. Photo: Office of the President of the Czech Republic® Zuzana Bönisch/Tomáš Fongus

Voices for Reconciliation

In the wake of the 2023 Voice to Parliament referendum, Opera Australia continues to endeavour to take meaningful steps towards reconciliation through our Reconciliation Action Plan. In May, we answered a call to singers across the country to 'come together in song' and participate in Voices for Reconciliation. We registered to perform and record the Warumpi Band's single 'Blackfella/Whitefella' which, since being released in 1985, has become an anthem for the reconciliation movement in Australia. All Opera Australia employees – singers or not! – were invited to join in.

It was a fantastic opportunity to rehearse and film a performance, with Head of Music Tahu Matheson leading us through the music from the piano. Some of our finest singers, including Jane Ede, Andrew Moran, and Celeste Haworth, encouraged others to join in, and complemented the less polished but equally enthusiastic efforts of OA non-performers. Our **performance** was shared on National Reconciliation Week channels. As an organisation made up of so many Australians, we recognise National Reconciliation Week as an opportunity to learn about our history and culture, and consider how we can contribute to reaching reconciliation in Australia, both individually and collectively.

Bridging musical traditions

We are also working towards an innovative musical collaboration that honours Australia's First Nations cultures. In 2024, Opera Australia commissioned Wiradjuri composer Shauntai Sherree Abdul-Rahman and arranger Stefan Cassomenos to create a song that fuses operatic tradition with the world's oldest continuous culture. Recently at The Opera Centre we hosted an inspiring two-day creative workshop with Shauntai and Stefan. Young Artist and Biripi man Elias Wilson joined the workshop to perform an aria from one of the world's first operas and experiment with reimagining fragments of this classical piece to inform the creation of the song.

The workshop fostered discussions about the artistic vision behind the song, cultural and musical parallels between early opera and Aboriginal culture, potential future applications of this collaborative work, and shared stories of musical inspiration across different cultural traditions. Shauntai and Stefan have developed a clear compositional plan and will continue their collaborative work. We look forward to sharing more developments as this beautiful piece of music takes shape.

First Nations music education

Similarly in 2024, we began exploring a potential music education partnership with Darkinjung Barker and Ngarralingayil Barker. Initial meetings held at both Barker College and The Opera Centre have identified a shared vision for enriched and reciprocal music learning for Indigenous students and teachers – as well as for Opera Australia's performers and staff. We look forward to continuing our conversations and shared learning when members of our Reconciliation Action Plan working group will enjoy a morning with the Darkinjung Barker teachers and students at the Yarramalong campus – in a culturally sensitive and affirming setting – in May 2025.

“At a time in their lives when young people can find it difficult to communicate their emotions, opera can express the things that are hard to say. That’s where opera does its best work.”

NATHAN GILKES, HEAD OF EDUCATION, LEARNING, AND PARTICIPATION

In 2024 Opera Australia reassessed its Schools Tour program, which for many years has brought high-quality opera performance into schools and helped foster a love of the performing arts for thousands of young people throughout Victoria and New South Wales. We recruited a Head of Education, Learning, and Participation (ELP) to recalibrate and reinvigorate our education work. Setting out to think about what opera can teach us in the 21st century, Nathan Gilkes, a leader in arts education and Helpmann Award-winning composer in theatre for young people, is aiming to transform how Australian young people engage with and think about opera, and revamp the artform’s relevance in communities across the country.

Gilkes believes opera has much to offer rising generations. “Like lots of young people we know, opera deals with BIG emotions: love, conflict, power, betrayal – all the primal emotions of our human experience.” Gilkes says seeing these feelings portrayed on stage helps young people to understand their emotional worlds.

The new Education, Learning, and Participation program is opening opera up across three areas: engaging primary and high school students through school workshops and incursion concerts; sharing cultural experiences in communities with a focus on singing events and community-led art projects; and working with aspiring performing artists and creatives to offer work experience and

youth intensives at our Opera Centres in Sydney and Melbourne. Initiatives are designed to build knowledge and skills, and industry connections for young people.

In the ELP program, participation with culturally diverse communities is key. Gilkes says, “Opera is inherently multidisciplinary, combining music, song, drama, dance, design, history, language, and visual art, so everyone can access it in their own way and from their own experiences and backgrounds.” From facilitating meaningful creative learning experiences for students and sharing cultural experiences in communities to forging education and professional pathways for aspiring young artists and creatives, Opera Australia is aiming for as many young people as possible to experience the transformative power of music and song.

In 2024 new community engagement activities kicked off with a Life Drawing and Opera workshop for families at the Sydney Opera House which was attended by 60 people. This was followed by a Visual Art, Costume, and Opera workshop in Geelong, centred around our *Magic Flute* season there. This workshop was delivered in collaboration with the Creative Geelong Makers Space and Geelong Arts Centre and attracted 40 participants. A *Magic Flute* Education Pack was also produced and distributed to schools in the Geelong region and this resource, along with many others, are now available for all schools across Australia to access.



New community activities: A free Life Drawing and Opera workshop at the Sydney Opera House. Photo: Nathan Gilkes

Opera Australia is sensitive to and supports the Australian performing arts ecosystem. We provide access to our Opera Centre facilities in both Sydney and Melbourne at heavily discounted rates for artists, creative professionals, arts organisations, and not-for-profits.

Our Melbourne venue can host up to 200 people, while our Sydney space accommodates up to 162 individuals. Available facilities include specialised musical coaching rooms and acoustically optimised rehearsal spaces. The Melbourne Opera Centre (MOC) serves as a collaborative hub where we share office space with Musica Viva, Melba Opera Trust, and The Opera Society. Similarly, our Sydney location at The Opera Centre (TOC) houses Pinchgut Opera alongside our own operations.

Opera Australia further strengthens the arts ecosystem by offering comprehensive support services to Australian performing arts companies across all scales. These include knowledge exchange, professional development, technical consultation, and production resource lending. Throughout 2024, 15 organisations benefitted from complimentary or subsidised access to these services.

Our rehearsal spaces shared in Sydney and Melbourne

In 2024, we were pleased to assist Lyric Opera of Melbourne to cement its place in Victoria as a strong voice in presenting modern and new works by Australian creators. In August we provided free space at our Melbourne Opera Centre for Lyric to rehearse the Australian work *The Children's Bach* (after the novella by Helen Garner) which was also performed in August. Since Artistic Director Patrick Burns commenced in the role in 2022, Lyric has focused its efforts on presenting high-quality chamber opera productions that provide valuable early career experience to emerging singers and creatives. The seasons have centred around presenting works by leading Australian composers, librettists, and authors, with music by Elena Kats-Chernin (*Iphis*), Mary Finsterer (*Biographica*), and this year Andrew Schultz (*The Children's Bach*), directed by Katy Maudlin and Heather Fairbairn.

"On behalf of the Board and The Children's Bach team, we want to thank OA for the magnificent support by way of rehearsal space for this production - it truly makes such a difference to our 'smell of an oily rag' opera company that punches far above its weight."

SUZANNE CHAUNDY, CHAIR,
LYRIC OPERA MELBOURNE



Opera Australia was pleased to support the production of *The Children's Bach* by Lyric Opera of Melbourne and Theatre Works directed by Katy Maudlin and designed by Jacob Battista.

Photo: Jodie Hutchinson

For Sydney Festival's *Siegfried & Roy: The Unauthorised Opera* performed in January 2025 at Sydney Theatre Company, OA provided free creative space for six weeks during 2024 for creative development and rehearsals. The production's costume designer was provided access to the OA wardrobe department, and an OA répétiteur was provided for some of the rehearsals. To assist with Sydney Festival marketing efforts, we included the production in our subscription brochure. Bestowing it five stars, *Limelight Magazine* reported that librettist/director Constantine Costi and composer/librettist Luke Di Somma "have come up trumps, creating a tragicomic opera that is as camp as it is moving."

Our orchestra on other stages

Supporting the 2024 IFAC Handa Australian Singing Competition was our Opera Australia Orchestra, conducted by Tahu Matheson. On Thursday 19 September at The Concourse Concert Hall, Chatswood, five classical singers competed for the 2024 ASC in the presence of IFAC International Executive Director Midori Miyazaki, the then-CEO of Opera Australia Fiona Allan, the Consul-General of Italy Dr Gianluca Rubagotti, and many influential figures in the opera world. The winner was 24-year-old soprano from NSW, Eden Shifroni, and all finalists received various scholarships for further study. The independent judging panel for the finals comprised Jane Ede, Nicole Dorigo, Benjamin Rasheed, and Barry Ryan OAM, with National Adjudicator Natalie Aroyan, who gave an inspiring speech.

Scenery for Sydney Festival *High Noon* and *GWB Entertainment's The Lord of the Rings – A Musical Tale*

Opera Australia's manufacturing teams are regularly engaged by Australian and international performing arts companies to make scenery, props, and costumes. In 2024 our highly-skilled, specialist technicians assisted making scenery for Sydney Festival's Australian exclusive of *Dark Noon* which transformed the Sydney Town Hall into an immersive experience of American history. Our talented team also made scenery for *GWB Entertainment's* production of *The Lord of the Rings – A Musical Tale*.

Discounted storage at Cala Street, Melbourne

- Arts Centre Melbourne
- Victorian Opera at Cala Street

Costume, props, manufacturing, and studio hire support

- Belvoir Street Theatre
- Hayes Theatre Company
- Pinchgut Opera
- Stage Artz Theatre Company and Sydney Children's Hospital Foundation Charity performance, Glen St Theatre
- Sydney Opera Musical Society

Not-for-profits assisted with rehearsal space:

Melbourne Opera Centre:

- Lyric Opera of Melbourne
- Melbourne Chamber Orchestra
- Melba Opera Trust
- Melbourne Symphony Orchestra
- Melbourne Youth Orchestra
- Musica Viva
- Omega Ensemble
- Opera Society
- Orchestra Victoria
- Victorian Opera

The Opera Centre, Surry Hills (Sydney):

- Adelaide University
- Australian Youth Orchestra
- Belvoir Street Theatre
- Ensemble APEX
- Melbourne University
- Pinchgut Opera (rehearsal and office space)
- Joan Sutherland & Richard Bonyng Foundation
- Sydney Festival
- Sydney Symphony Orchestra
- Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts

In 2024 Opera Australia joined some of the biggest names in the Australian music industry to support Australian Women in Music and the Australian Women in Music Awards (AWMA), founded by Executive Producer and Program Director Vicki Gordon, now in its sixth year. The inaugural Opera Impact Award was established in partnership with Opera Australia to acknowledge a female, non-binary and gender diverse person working in the field of opera as an artist, creative producer or manager, through which their vision and agency has made a significant impact on the ongoing development of the artform.

The inaugural Opera Impact Award recipient, Linda Thompson, founder and CEO of the Australian Contemporary Opera Company, was recognised for her pioneering contribution to Australian opera. In October Linda told Melbourne's *Inner City News* that her journey in opera began as a teenager, inspired by a teacher who introduced her to the artform. "It was Joan Sutherland singing and [my teacher] said, 'You could do that,'" Thompson recalled. "I had no idea what I was letting myself in for, but I've been involved in opera ever since." For Thompson, opera is a "constant source of inspiration," with its power to combine music, drama, and storytelling. We offered our congratulations to Thompson and the other Opera Australia Impact Award finalists, Andrée Greenwell and Jessica O'Donoghue, who were selected along with all finalists by the 49-seat AWMA Juror Council, led by Juror Chair Dr Diana Tolmie.

The Awards ceremony was held in Meanjin Brisbane during one of the toughest years in the history of live music in Australia. Hosted by Yumi Stynes with Sarah McLeod, the Awards paid tribute to women dedicated to positive change in the industry. An audience of over 450 music industry leaders, artists, and guests enjoyed performances by Sarah Blasko, Kasey Chambers, Mo'Ju, Sarah McLeod, Katie Noonan & Karin Schaupp, Karen Lee Andrews, and Emily Wurramara. Dame Joan Sutherland OM, AC, DBE was inducted into the 2024 AWMA Honour Roll.

Her granddaughter, Natasha Bonyngne, received the posthumous Honour Roll acknowledgement, marked with a special tribute performance by First Nations soprano and proud Koa, Kuku Yalanji, Wakka Wakka woman, Nina Korbe. In March, Korbe performed her professional debut in the role of Maria in Opera Australia's *West Side Story* at Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour.

Opera Australia was proud to support Australian Women in Music alongside the Queensland Government and all supporting partners and sponsors of AWMA. This year AWMA also welcomed Yolŋu Elders from Nhulunbuy on Gumatj land in North-East Arnhem Land, the Warumungu Elders from Tennant Creek, and the Anangu Elders from Mutitjulu on Pitjantjatjara land as part of the largest First Nations delegation ever to attend the event, with support from Australian Regional and Remote Community Services (ARRCS) in Darwin.



Founder and CEO of the Australian Contemporary Opera Company Linda Thompson (right) wins the inaugural Opera Australia Impact Award at the Australian Women in Music Awards. Pictured with the then-CEO of Opera Australia, Fiona Allan. Photo: Australian Women in Music

ACKNOWLEDGING OUR TEAM



Through music and song our exceptionally talented artists and musicians bring powerful stories to life for our audiences. Our innovative creatives – including stage managers, set and costume designers, and lighting technicians – infuse vitality into every element of our productions. Meanwhile, our committed and highly skilled arts managers and administrators demonstrate unwavering dedication to their responsibilities, to the artform, and to supporting their performing colleagues. While the instability of the past few years has been challenging for our employees on a number of fronts, we are striving to create an environment where our team members can flourish, achieving both personal and company objectives.

Toi! Toi! Toi! to all our teams:

- Artistic Administrators
- AV/ Sound and Vision
- Business Services
- Chorus/ Children's Chorus
- Manufacturing and Workshop
- Mechanists
- Music Librarians
- Musicians
- Performing Artists
- Principal Artists
- Producers
- Props and Scenic Art
- Site Operations
- Stage Management
- Stores and Facilities
- Technical Administrators
- Technicians
- Wardrobe, Wigs, Hair, and Makeup
- Company Management

The outstanding abilities and expertise of our people are acknowledged each year through industry awards. In recognition of their work across our company comprising a multigenerational workforce across all departments who collaborate to achieve artistic excellence, prestigious accolades were bestowed.

OperaChaser Awards

Recognising opera performed in Melbourne, we are proud of our three winning productions:

- *Eucalyptus* (co-produced with Victorian Opera): Outstanding Production; Outstanding New Australian Work; and Trudy Dalgeish for Outstanding Lighting Design
- *Tosca*: Diego Torre for Outstanding Male in a Lead Role
- *Breaking the Waves*: Jennifer Black for Outstanding Female in a Lead Role

Sydney Theatre Awards

Established to celebrate the strength, quality, and diversity of theatre in Sydney, we were delighted to receive two Sydney Theatre Awards for *Sunset Boulevard*:

- Tim Draxl: the Judith Johnson Award for Best Performance in a Leading Role in a Musical
- Ashleigh Rubenach: Best Performance in a Supporting Role in a Musical

Representing Opera Australia, our longest serving member of the Chorus, Jin Tea Kim, was honoured to meet Their Majesties King Charles III and Queen Camilla in October at our Sydney performance home. Photo: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Green Room Awards

Celebrating excellence in Melbourne's performing arts, three Opera Australia productions were recognised: *Tosca*, *Sunset Boulevard*, and *Eucalyptus*. In addition, we congratulated our Victorian Opera colleagues on their nine nominations for *Candide*, presented by Opera Australia at the Sydney Opera House in 2025.

Nominations:

- *Sunset Boulevard*: Paul Warwick Griffin for Outstanding Direction – Stage
- *Sunset Boulevard*: Robert Grubb for Outstanding Artist in a Supporting Role in a Musical
- *Sunset Boulevard*: David Greaseley (Sound) for Outstanding Design of a Musical
- *Sunset Boulevard*: Paul Christ and Kristen Blodgette for Outstanding Music Direction of a Musical
- *Tosca*: Diego Torre for Outstanding Performance in a Lead Role in an Opera
- *Tosca*: Karah Son for Outstanding Performance in a Lead Role in an Opera
- *Eucalyptus*: Desiree Frahn for Outstanding Performance in a Lead Role in an Opera
- *Eucalyptus*: Ensemble for Outstanding Musical Achievement in an Opera

Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award

In October we congratulated Anna-Louise Cole, winner of the Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award, providing \$25,000 to support an emerging singer from Australia or New Zealand, administered by our colleagues at the Melba Opera Trust. One of Australia’s most exciting dramatic sopranos, Anna-Louise has won acclaim for Opera Australia in the title role of Turandot, and both Sieglinde and Brünnhilde in the Brisbane performances of Wagner’s *Ring Cycle* in 2024.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Rod Sims AO,
Chair

Professor Warren Bebbington AM,
joined January 2024

Greta Bradman, joined June 2024

Warwick Bray

Jonathan Feder

Jane Hansen AO

Michelle Kam

Deena Shiff, Deputy Chair

Andrew Sisson AO, Deputy Chair

EXECUTIVE TEAM

Simon Militano,
Acting CEO

Chris Yates,
Technical Director

Simon Meilak,
Director of Marketing
and Communications

Rebecca Kitelinger,
Director of Development,
joined August 2024

Julia Hughes,
Director of People and Culture,
joined September 2024

ACKNOWLEDGING OUR TEAM

We are grateful for the creative excellence and dedication of all our artists and creatives who brought to life our productions during the year.

PRINCIPAL ARTISTS

Stacey Alleaume
Giselle Allen
Jonathan Alley
Richard Anderson
Maia Andrews
Pelham Andrews
Victor Antipenko
Natalie Aroyan
Jud Arthur
Kylie Bailey
Siro Battaglin
Nadine Benjamin
Paul Biencourt
Jennifer Black
Jennifer Bonner
Catherine Bouchier
Billy Bouchier
Kanen Breen
Sarah Brightman
Gregory Brown
Michael Burden
Nicole Car
Catherine Carby
Petah Cavallaro
Annabelle Chaffey
Samantha Clarke
Allan Clayton
Tobias Cole
Peter Coleman-Wright
James Crabb
Olivia Cranwell
Rebecca Currier
Michael Curtain
Tomas Dalton
Freddie De Tommaso

Benjamin Del Borrello
Genevieve Dickson
Keara Donohoe
Jarrod Draper
Tim Draxl
Gennadi Dubinsky
Christophe Dumaux
Samuel Dundas
Jane Ede
Malcolm Ede
Emily Edmonds
Daniella Ehrlich
Tristan Entwistle
Lauren Fagan
Desiree Frahn
Warwick Fyfe
Luke Gabbedy
Rodney Gilfry
Simon Gilkes
Julie Lea Goodwin
Lorina Gore
Giuseppina Grech
David Greco
Robert Grubb
Gevorg Hakobyan
Tom Hamilton
Russell Harcourt
Alexander Hargreaves
Celeste Haworth-Dias
Robert Hayward
Iain Henderson
Adam Hills
Kimberley Hodgson
Angela Hogan
Michael Honeyman
Georgina Hopson
Caitlin Hulcup
Kate Johnson
Adele Johnston
Natalie Jones
Nicholas Jones

Fiona Jopson
Tomáš Kantor
Reuben Kaye
Louise Keast
Paull-Anthony Keightley
Chad Kelly
Grace Kim
Jin Tea Kim
Simon Kim
Young Woo Kim
Nick Kirkup
Jeremy Kleeman
Nina Korbe
Rosario La Spina
Michael Lampard
Nathan Lay
Celeste Lazarenko
Na Ra Lee
Sandy Leung
John Longmuir
Shane Lawrence
Christopher Lowrey
Daniel Macey
Anthony Mackey
Jane Magão
Filipe Manu
Virgilio Marino
Tahu Matheson
Dominica Matthews
Emma Matthews
Jonathan McCauley
Ranald McCusker
Ali McGregor
Simon Meadows
Bree Meara
Ben Mingay
Andrew Moran
Eddie Muliaumaseali'i
Guy Noble
Mark Oates
Jessica O'Donoghue



Performers from Mount Gambier, Wagga Wagga, Alice Springs, Gold Coast, Canberra, Newcastle, Melbourne, and Adelaide – and one international cast member – descended on Sydney to perform the open-air season on the famous Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour stage.

Pictured: *West Side Story* Ensemble. Photo: Keith Saunders

Alexandra Oomens
 Daniel Ott
 Silvie Paladino
 David Parkin
 Emma Pearson
 Michael Petruccelli
 Adam Player
 Clifford Plumptre
 Alexander Pokryshevsky
 Haotian Qi
 Eugene Raggio
 Kiran Rajasingam
 Benjamin Rasheed
 Matthew Reardon
 Asher Reichman
 Phillip Rhodes
 Macon Riley
 Mitchell Riley
 Duncan Rock
 Ashleigh Rubenach
 Sophie Salvesani
 Michael Schade
 Indyana Schneider
 Joel Scott
 Alexander Sefton
 Shanul Sharma
 Ryan Sharp
 Sian Sharp
 Jane Sheldon
 Dimity Shepherd
 Helen Sherman
 Michael Smallwood
 Nicole Smeulders
 Karah Son
 Esther Song
 Manuel Stark Santos
 Adrian Strooper
 Ruth Strutt
 Leah Thomas
 Daniel Szesiong Todd
 Diego Torre
 Ashlyn Tymms
 Kang Wang
 Danita Weatherstone
 Patrick Whitbread
 Shanon Whitelock
 Katherine Wiles
 Andrew Williams
 Nardus Williams
 Cathy-Di Zhang

CHILD PRINCIPALS

Elijah Alkhair
 Harrison Coppock
 Sophie Cowall
 Flora Feldman
 Estelle Gilmovich
 Hugo Gilmovich
 Abbey Hammond
 Charlton Keogh
 Hugh Ling
 Zevariah Mann
 Piper Nuredini

Millie Price
 Thomas Prowse
 James Valanidas

CHORUS

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 Pamela Andrews
 Damian Arnold
 Tayla-Grace Azzopardi
 Kylie Bailey
 Jonathon Bam
 Regan Barber
 Carrie Barr
 Dean Bassett
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 Amy Berrisford
 John Rex Berry
 Paul Biencourt
 Eleanor Blythman
 Jennifer Bonner
 Catherine Bouchier
 William Bouchier
 Campbell Braithwaite
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 Benjamin Caukwell
 Annabelle Chaffey
 Doron Chester
 Eli Clarke
 Joe Clements
 Ben Colley
 Elizabeth Cooper
 Tiana Costanzo
 Steve Costi
 Rebecca Currier
 Tomas Dalton
 Genevieve Dickson
 John Donohoe
 Keara Donohoe
 Bronwyn Douglass
 Grace Driscoll
 Malcolm Ede
 Daniella Ehrlich
 Tristan Entwistle
 Olivia Federow-Yemm
 Emma Feliciano
 Ella Fitzpatrick
 Heather Fletcher
 Diego Garcia
 Simon Gilkes
 Christian Gillett
 Joel Granger
 Lyndon Green
 Madison Green
 Tom Hamilton
 Paul Hanlon
 Alexander Hargreaves
 Celeste Haworth-Dias

Stuart Haycock
 Ewan Herdman
 David Hidden
 Peter Ho
 Angela Hogan
 Phoebe-Celeste Humphreys
 Scott Irwin
 Luke Jarvis
 Hongxin Jiang
 Louise Keast
 Wayne Scott Kermond
 Jin Tea Kim
 Jerzy Kozlowski
 Stefan Lagoulis
 Alister Lamont
 Andrei Laptev
 Nathan Lay
 Celeste Lazarenko
 Na Ra Lee
 Sandy Leung
 Leah Lim
 Josephine Lopes
 Yolanda Lorenzato
 Anthony Mackey
 Chloë Marshall
 Jayme Jo Massoud
 Alexandra Mathew
 Lexie Mav
 Jonathan McCauley
 Mary McCorry
 Randal McCusker
 Bree Meara
 Avigalle Mendoza
 Noah Missell
 Matthew Nguyen
 Timothy Nunn
 Rebecca Ordiz
 Brittany Page
 Charlotte Page
 Morgan Palmer
 Belinda Paterson
 Olivia Payne
 Bronson Pfeiler
 Alessia Pintabona
 Adam Player
 Caity Plummer
 Clifford Plumptre
 Alexander Pokryshevsky
 Kiran Rajasingam
 Dimitri Raptis
 Benjamin Rasheed
 Asher Reichman
 Jamie Reisin
 Juel Riggall
 Laura Scandizzo
 Taylor Scanlan
 Shoumendu Schornikow
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 Lewis Shilvock
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 Daniel Wijngaarden
 Katherine Wiles
 Kathryn Williams
 P. Tucker Worley
 Massimo Zuccara

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 Isabella Arnup
 Zoey Bhatt
 Aria Calabro
 Oscar Carlton
 Harrison Coppock
 Herbie Cox
 Luca Dahan
 Xavier Daher
 Ava De Vries
 Bede Egerton-Warburton
 Jessamy Rose Facer
 Flora Feldman
 Estelle Gilmovich
 Rhys James Hankey
 Alyssia Jade
 Francesca Kong
 Mathilda Kwok
 Caleb Lee
 Hugh Ling
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 Daniel Nunan
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 Joshua Tran
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 Grace Walker-Barker
 Alexander Hugo Young

ACTORS

Billy Allagiannis
 Denzel Bruhn
 Toby Carey
 Anthony Finch
 Warren Glover
 Jackson Hurwood
 Anthony King
 Robert McLean
 Anthony Michaels
 Bayley Prendergast
 Jason Spindlow
 Tommy Thungsunawan
 Luke Visentin
 Hamish Wells

CHILD ACTORS

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 Dev Ravel

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 Mia Sfara
 Max Walburn
 Strickland Young

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 Su Choung
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 Lee Curran
 Michael Curtain
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 George Reeve
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 Richard Roberts
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 Jane Rossetto
 Imara Savage
 Denni Sayers
 Kiira Schmidt Carper
 Bob Scott
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 Naomi Symeou
 Kevin Tamanini
 Lee Tassie
 Brian Thomson
 Christos Tsiolkas
 Joseph Twist
 Alana Valentine
 Callum Walker
 Ashley Wallen
 Blake Wells
 Jonathan Wilson
 Michael Yeargan
 Brendan Yeates
 Francesca Zambello

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NATIONAL TOUR)**

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 Anna Albert
 Jessica An
 Sophia Ang
 Emilia Antcliff
 Matthieu Arama
 Stephanie Arnold
 Victor Avila Luvsangenden
 Dominic Azzi
 Hayden Barltrop
 Anthony Barnhill
 Nadia Barrow
 Sebastian Bartels
 Edmund Bastian
 Nicola Bell
 Adrian Bendt
 Christopher Bennett
 Lillian Bennett
 Ella Bennetts
 Diane Berger
 Eleanor Betts
 Alexandra Bierl
 Isla Biffin



Powerhouse Australian singer Peter Coleman-Wright AO performing with Orchestra Victoria in The Puccini Gala Concert at Hamer Hall, Melbourne. Photo: Jeff Busby

Josef Bisits	Tom Ferris	Stephen Lalor	Eve Osborn
Virginia Blunt	Charlotte Fetherston	Genevieve Lang	Noah Oshiro
Bourian Boubbov	Karina Filipi	Matthew Larsen	Lisa Osmialowski
Milen Boubbov	Gabriel Fischer	Curtis Lau	Brett Page
Sydney Braunfeld	Alex Fontaine	Kate Lawson	Tim Paillas
Michelle Brazier	Greg Ford	Dana Lee	Jaana Pallandi
Lisa Breckenridge	Nicole Forsyth	Jessica Lee	Ruben Palma
Tim Brigden	James Fortune	Christina Leonard	Loretta Palmeiro
Ella Brinch	Kylie Foster	John Lewis	Jack Peggie
Laura Brown	Clare Fox	Jessica Li	Jenny Penno
Mark Bruwel	Scott Frankcombe	Jing Lin	Chris Perrin
Matthew Bubb	Dominique Gallery	Heather Lindsay	Nemanja Petkovic
Huy-Nguyen Bui	Tony Gault	Marrianne Liu	Ariel Postmus
Heather Burnley	Paul Ghica	Rain Liu	Susanne Powell
Colin Burrows	Richard Gleeson	Reafen Liu	Laura Power
Jamie Cameron	Matthew Greco	Heather Lloyd	Alison Pratt
Ray Cassar	Emily Green	Dominic Longhurst	Georgina Price
Alexandra Castle	Mariana Green	Daniel Lopez	Kate Proctor
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Caron Chan	Nathan Greentree	Katherine Lukey	Marshall Read
Petra Chaplin	Colin Gridale	Rebecca Luton	Craig Renshaw
Amanda Chen	Dominique Guerbois	Ursula Luxton	Andrew Robertson
Tobias Chisnall	Bonita Han-Williams	Ryan Lynch	Katie Robinson
Minah Choe	Alice Hanna	Tracy Lynch	Blake Roden
Yena Choi	Josef Hanna	Rowena Macneish	Daniel Rosenbaum
Su Choung	Natalia Harvey	Julia Magri	Jane Rosenson
Ellen Choung	Yuki Harwood	Cian Malikides	Craig Ross
David Clarence	Bruce Hellmers	Gergely Malyusz	Richard Rourke
Anthony Clarke	Daniel Henderson	Kevin Man	Noah Rudd
Brendan Clarke	Jonathan Henderson	Chris Martin	Jonathan Ryan
Joshua Clarke	Rebecca Herman	Kerry Martin	Ben Saffir
Lucy Clarke-Randazzo	Joshua Hill	Tomomi Matsuo	Rafael Salgado
Meg Cohen	Amanda Hollins	Yuhki Mayne	Freya Schack-Arnott
Matthew Collins	Simon Holt	Jeremy Mazurek	Stephan Schafer
Virginia Comerford	Nanda Hong	Conall McClure	Véronique Serret
Beth Condon	Tara Houghton	Alex McCracken	Eliza Shephard
Natasha Conrau	Jennifer Hoy	James McCrow	David Silva
Anna Cooper	Teije Hylkema	Abi McCunn	Oliver Simpson
Stephanie Cooper	Margaret Iddison	Jenny McLeod-Sneyd	Rachel Siu
Jack Cremer	Tamami Iino	Melanie McLoughlin	Benjamin Smith
Nigel Crocker	Yu-Qing Rebecca Irwin	Andrew Meisel	Romola Smith
Jacqueline Cronin	Sandra Ismail	Eszter Mikes-Liu	Shelley Soerensen
Nicola Crowe	Ben Jacks	Lucie Miller	Philip South
Kendal Cuneo	Victoria Jacono	Craig Mitten	Luke Spicer
Darcy Dauth	Catherine Jang	Kate Moloney	Ben Spiers
Josh Davies	Emma Jardine	Chris Moran	James Steendam
Daniel Dean	Adam Jeffrey	David Moran	Robert Stonestreet
Andrew Doyle	Andrew Jezek	Anna Murakawa	Eleanor Streatfeild
Craig Driscoll	Roslyn Jorgensen	Amanda Murphy	Leanne Sullivan
Jenny Druery	Kerryn Joyce	Timothy Murray	Valeriy Suraev
Andrew Dunlop	Clare Kahn	Airena Nakamura	Simon Sweeney
Alexei Dupressoir	Justin Kearin	Emile Nelson	Luna Takai
Rachel Dyker	Adrian Keating	Emily Newham	Vanessa Tammetta
Jack Earle	Joseph Kelly	Graham Nichols	Kelly Tang
James Eccles	Julie Kim	Paul Nicolaou	Greg Taylor
Tamara Elias	Nicole Kim	Lamorna Nightingale	Jennifer Taylor
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Alex Farrugia	Marek Kruszynski	Georgina Oakes	Alex Tsang
Brett Favell	Beverly Kwan	Matthew Ockenden	Michael Tyack
Antonio Fernandez	Esteban Labrador	Adele Ohki	Catalin Ungureanu

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 Lee Wadenpfohl
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 Tracy Wan
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 Elli Welsh
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 Kristian Winther
 Simon Wolnizer
 Daisy Wong
 Natalie Wong
 Melissa Woodroffe
 Steve Wright
 Michael Wyborn
 Sandy Xu
 Katie Zagorski
 Stephanie Zarka
 Sarah Zhu

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 Evgeny Chebykin
 Bob Collins
 Lachlan Davidson
 Leon Duncan
 Jack Earle
 Melissa Edwards
 Natasha Fearnside
 Callum G'Froerer
 Kath Gillon
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 Tristan Rebien
 Lisa Reynolds
 Anton Schroeder
 Ben Spiers

Penny Stevenson
 Roy Theaker
 Joanna To
 Matt Tzivakis
 Kohan van Sambeec

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 Anthony Barnhill
 Simon Bruckard
 Matthew Carey
 Brian Castles-Onion
 Paul Christ
 Jessica Cottis
 Paul Fitzsimon
 Johannes Fritzsich
 Simon Holt
 Dane Lam
 Tahu Matheson
 Teresa Riveiro Böhm
 Guy Simpson
 Daniel Smith
 Jack Symonds
 Garry Walker
 Brett Weymark
 Lidiya Yankovskaya
 Zoe Zeniodi

CREW

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 Elena Acquaviva
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 Maria Anagnostous
 Matthew Arthur
 Kem Austin
 Linsey Bancroft
 Elise Bankier
 Aneka Baughan
 Curtis Bennett
 Thor Bjorklund Dam
 Zach Bowen
 Jorden Brebach
 Merlyn Brown
 David Browne
 Madison Burkett
 Ellesia Burton
 Laura Cagnacci
 Thomas Caldwell
 Emma Callaghan
 Lachlan Cameron
 Daniel Cannon
 Coleta Carbonell
 Matthew Carey
 Angela Cascarino
 Luke Champman
 Catherine Chan
 Stephanie Chisholm

Marcus Collins
 Darcy Cook
 Dean Cook
 Fiona Cooper-Sutherland
 Polly Cooper
 Timothy Corne
 Kyham Cox
 Mitchell Craig
 Peter Crome
 Carla D'Annunzio
 Alex Dallas
 Stella Dandolo
 Hillary Daniels
 Mogan Daniels
 Rebecca Dilley
 Simon Doe
 Deborah Dourneau
 David Dudek
 Connie Dyson
 Rhys Farmer
 Angela Fieldhouse
 Kelly Fratta
 Brendan Freebody
 Jason Fripp
 William Frohlich
 Ken Frost
 Angus Furnell
 Matt Gearin
 Michael Gilders
 Camille Good
 Alex Grbas
 Ella Griffin
 Oscar Guarnizo
 James Harling
 Justine Haselton
 Scott Hendry
 Thomas Hennessy
 Jacinda Hill
 Sally Hitchcock
 Felicity Hollingbery
 Roslyn Howell
 Samuel Jessudoss
 Iain Jolly
 Summer Jones
 Alexis Kemister
 Grant Kennelly
 Shula Keyte
 Lorraine Koh
 Ash Kurrle
 Aidan Lam
 Angus Langsford
 Russell Leonard
 Nicole Lepusic
 Oliver Lewis
 Heidi Lincoln
 Antony Lloyd
 Hannah Lobelson
 Rodney Longford
 Adam Lowe

Jake Luther
 Fraser Mackenzie
 Hepi Maihi
 Dom McDonald
 Karen McGregor
 Daniel McInnes-Hull
 Tulloulah Moghini
 Adam Morris
 Isaac Morris
 Ben Musgrave
 Siobhan Nealon
 Jessica Jane Newman
 Angus Nott
 Naomi O'Connor
 Matt Osborn
 Abe Otenstein
 Fed Pancotto
 Oriana Papa
 Mat Papdi
 Charlotte Pattison
 Reyne Perry
 Hamish Peters
 Brendan Freebody
 Jamie Peterson
 Lori Piquemal
 Serena Pollock
 Ash Poole
 Alice Prescott
 Joshan Ramadani
 James Reville
 Natalie Riordan
 Rebecca Ritchie
 Michael Rodgers
 Liam Roughley
 Jörn Schäfer
 Joern Schaefer
 Matt Schubach
 Gary Senior
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 Sam Tippet
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 Charlotte Wiltshire
 Sam Wylie
 Hiu Wun Zee

The past year has been one of sustained generosity and commitment from our dedicated donors and corporate partners. Their continued support ensures that Opera Australia remains a beacon of artistic excellence, enriching our community with world-class performances, nationwide touring, and professional training initiatives.

In 2024, our donors and corporate partners supported a diverse array of projects, including:

- The Susan & Isaac Wakil Foundation helped fund our Youth Access Program, which offers \$20 tickets and ensures opera is accessible to all.
- Our renewed Young Artist Program auditioned hundreds in preparation for our 2025 launch thanks to the incredible backing of Principal Patron Maureen Wheeler AO.

The patron program for any arts organisation is seen as the lifeblood of the company. Made up of people whose love of opera inspires them to give generously each season, every donation, no matter the size, helps to sustain our company, ensuring Opera Australia thrives. These donors enable Opera Australia to focus on the pillars of our strategic plan and nurture our ambition to develop our artform, audience, and company.

Our patrons are the foundation of our philanthropic support, collectively contributing millions to our organisation in 2024. This steadfast support speaks to their deep appreciation for Opera Australia and shared vision for our future.

Many of our donors – individuals, trusts, and foundations – have been longstanding supporters, and we are most grateful for their continued commitment. Their contributions help sustain

critical artistic programming, artist development, and community engagement efforts. As we look ahead, we are committed to deepening our relationships with our patrons, fostering new opportunities for engagement, and ensuring their generosity is recognised and celebrated.

Corporate support continues to play a significant role in the financial health of Opera Australia. These partnerships allow us to expand our reach, bring ambitious productions to the stage, and provide generous contra value to operate our business efficiently.

We are especially grateful to our major corporate supporters, whose generosity has helped maintain our company's financial stability. Their contributions are not only an investment in the arts but also a testament to the impact of opera on our cultural landscape. We will continue cultivating these relationships and exploring new partnerships that align with our mission in the coming years.

Special acknowledgements

Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour, one of the pinnacle arts events of the Sydney summer, was again a great success thanks to the generosity of our Patron-in-Chief Dr Haruhisa Handa and the International Foundation for Arts and Culture.

We gratefully acknowledge our Hero Partners: HSBC and Qantas. Both steadfast supporters of Opera Australia, HSBC has donated generously since 2019, and Qantas has partnered with us for over 50 years.

Finally, we want to acknowledge the unwavering support of BMW and our treasured BMW Opera for All.



(L-R) Jarrod Draper and Ashleigh Rubenach performing 'I've Never Been in Love Before' from *Guys & Dolls* during HSBC's pre-*Sunset Boulevard* dinner in the Utzon Room, Sydney Opera House. Photo: HSBC

Looking forward

As we move into the next season, we remain optimistic about the future of our development efforts. Our patrons and corporate partners continue to demonstrate remarkable generosity, and we are committed to strengthening these relationships while also identifying new avenues for support. With their continued dedication, we are confident in our ability to sustain and grow our artistic and educational programming for years to come.

Celebrating our donors

Our heartfelt thanks to our many supporters who made it possible to share the joy of opera on our stages and in our communities across Australia in 2024.

We are deeply grateful for their support which has had a significant impact on the quality, growth, and excellence of our programs. Opera Australia also celebrates our donors' commitment to developing the next generation of artists and audiences and ensuring that opera is available to all.

Many thanks to those who are listed here, as well as those who wish to remain anonymous, for being part of our Opera Australia family.

PATRONS

Patron-in-Chief:
Dr Haruhisa Handa –
International Foundation
for Arts and Culture
Principal Patron,
Young Artist Program:
Maureen Wheeler AO

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Andrew Sisson AO and
Tracey Sisson
Susan & Isaac Wakil Foundation
Mr Geoffrey White OAM
and Mrs Sally White OAM

ARIA CIRCLE – \$50,000+

Philip Bacon AO
Opera Society
Dr Alison Pert and Rod Sims AO
Anonymous (3)

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by Jane Hemstrich AO
Anna Dowsley is supported
by Susie Dickson and the late
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Jane Ede is supported
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Paul Fitzsimon is supported
by Ina Bornkessel-Schlesewsky
and Matthias Schlesewsky
Warwick Fyfe is supported
by Lisa McKern
Nicholas Jones is supported
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and Matthias Schlesewsky
Michael Lampard is supported
by Opera Society from the
Eleanor Blakemore Bequest
Shanul Sharma is supported by
Dr Alison Pert and Rod Sims AO
Esther Song is supported
by Opera Society from the
Eleanor Blakemore Bequest
Kang Wang is supported
by Kay Bryan
Elizabeth Albert and the
late Robert Albert AO RFD RD
Tom and Eva Begg
Warwick and Lida Bray
Juliana and Robert Clemesha
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The Estate of the
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Katie Lahey AM
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Kate Mason
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Opera Australia is assisted by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body, by the NSW Government through Create NSW, and by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



The Opera Australia Capital Fund (OACF) was established with the simple but important goal – to build capital reserves that would provide a reliable and consistent source of funding for Australia's national opera company. I am very pleased to report that in 2024 the Capital Fund was able to make its largest annual grant yet, with a distribution of \$1.1m to Opera Australia. This was the fifth year in a row that OACF has been able to provide an annual grant of \$1m or more. Since the Capital Fund's first distribution in 2007, we have now made grants to Opera Australia totalling \$12m.

Underpinning this progress has been the security of the corpus of funds that has grown through a combination of donations, bequests, and investment income. My fellow Directors and I take seriously our responsibility to ensure that the management of OACF remains aligned with its original vision. By the end of 2024, the invested capital had reached \$32m, a significant achievement as we prepared for our 25th anniversary year. The sustained growth of OACF, and the measurable impact it is having on the annual distribution to Opera Australia, is only possible through the commitment and generosity of the Capital Fund's supporters to our fundraising campaigns, special events, and our bequest program.

Bequests make a meaningful difference to OACF's reserves and therefore to the long-term financial sustainability of Opera Australia. In 2024 we refreshed our work in this important area, sharing details about

bequest support more widely. Every bequest to the Capital Fund – large or small – is invested and endures. I am grateful to those who decided to remember OACF in this inspiring way, and who notified us of their intentions.

2024 saw the Capital Fund renew its commitment to the future of opera in Australia, with the launch of the 25th Anniversary Campaign, chaired by Philip Bacon AO. We have set ourselves a goal over the next five years to increase OACF's corpus by 25 per cent, through a combination of donations and bequests received. A successful fundraising campaign will give the Capital Fund the means to increase our annual grant, helping to secure the future for this unique artform in Australia. With a campaign goal of \$7.5m, it is wonderful to report that already we have reached more than \$3m of our ambitious target.

I wish to thank our Council of Governors, whose steadfast support has led the way in philanthropic giving, and to all those who donated to the Capital Fund in 2024. I was delighted to welcome and acknowledge the generous contribution of the Council of Governors at their annual dinner in February, when mezzo-soprano Anna Dowsley sang in an exclusive recital for our donors. In June we were in London for our annual UK dinner, when supporters gathered to enjoy a truly memorable evening, made more so by the recital by baritone Samuel Dale Johnson. This celebrated evening at Alain Ducasse at The Dorchester is made possible thanks to the loyal support of Dorchester Collection.

In October OACF hosted the Gala Opera Dinner in Melbourne. It was a glittering evening with superb performances from the future stars of Opera Australia, and I thank all those who supported this stellar occasion. The year closed with a reception hosted by Her Excellency The Governor of NSW at Government House. The evening marked the beginning of the Capital Fund's 25th Anniversary year, and Emily Edmonds and Emma Matthews performed in a delightful recital for guests.

Throughout 2024, I was supported by fellow OACF Directors Fiona Allan, Shaun Kenny, Justice François Kunc, Roslyn Packer AC, Tania Seary, and Rod Sims AO – I thank them for their careful stewardship and commitment. Together, we thank all those who contributed to the Capital Fund's work, and who donated to our fundraising activities with confidence and a vision shared.

One of my predecessors described the Capital Fund as a gift to the future. OACF takes the long view, here in the good times and in the challenging times, determined to continue its work to ensure a secure future for Opera Australia. Just as the Capital Fund's founders intended it to be.

DAVID ARMSTRONG, CHAIRMAN

The Opera Australia Capital Fund was established 25 years ago to build capital reserves to help ensure the ongoing financial viability of Opera Australia.

The Council of Governors comprises Directors of the Trustee Company and supporters who have either contributed a significant donation or pledged a specific bequest. The Capital Fund is grateful for the Council of Governors' exceptional generosity and commitment to its goals.

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The Capital Fund continues to grow and is now able to make a significant annual distribution to Opera Australia. As it marks its 25th anniversary, the Capital Fund thanks all those who have donated, contributing to its impact and success.

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A bequest (a gift in your Will) to the Opera Australia Capital Fund is a lasting contribution to the future of opera in Australia.

All bequests are invested by the Capital Fund for the benefit of future generations of opera artists and audiences.

Bequests sustain every aspect of Opera Australia's work, and the Capital Fund is enormously grateful for the enduring support received through bequests from the estates of:-

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If you wish to discuss either a donation to the Capital Fund or your bequest plans, please contact Nicholas Selman:

**02 9318 8305
nicholas.selman@opera.org.au**

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The Australian Premiere of *Gilgamesh*: Opera Australia's first collaboration with Sydney Chamber Opera and Carriageworks brought Jack Symonds' new Australian opera to Sydney.
Photo: Daniel Boud

AN OPERA COMPANY FOR A 21ST-CENTURY AUSTRALIA