

Media Release
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New Artistic Director expands the company's footprint and embraces Australian talent in her inaugural 2024 season



Opera Australia's (OA) new Artistic Director Jo Davies has announced her highly anticipated 2024 Season, signalling a fresh new perspective at the helm of Australia's largest performing arts company.

With her eye on the future, Ms Davies' first season demonstrates a commitment to local collaborations and championing homegrown talent, with the majority of cast and creatives in the 2024 season from Australia.

Additionally, with the State Theatre at Arts Centre Melbourne closing next year for refurbishment, 2024 will see the Company extend its footprint in Victoria, staging performances at four different venues across Melbourne, including Margaret Court Arena, the Palais Theatre, Hamer Hall and Federation Square, as well as performing in the recently refurbished Geelong Arts Centre, while the National Tour will premiere a brand new production in Dandenong.

"It is with great pleasure that I can announce the 2024 program. It is filled with extraordinary productions and reimagines the OA experience for Victorian audiences, from the enduring brilliance of Puccini and Mozart to some of the most exciting opera composers of our day.

"There is so much Australian talent to harness, which is an exciting prospect for me as an incoming Artistic Director. This not only includes those working locally, but also reconnecting with talent who are based abroad. Alongside this, I am also determined to maintain Opera Australia's strong connection to the international opera community, ensuring the company continues to build on its reputation for excellence and innovation, and positions itself as a leader in the global creative sector.

"To this end, the closure of the State Theatre has presented us with a creative opportunity to expand into theatres and spaces across and beyond the city, challenging us to innovate as we continue to explore alternative and non-conventional venues while our traditional theatre venue options remain limited," said Ms Davies.

CEO Fiona Allan is delighted to be sharing the first Opera Australia season under the artistic leadership of Jo Davies.

"Opera Australia's new direction is as a company that is much more collaborative, committed to creative diversity and equity, and in the development and promotion of Australian talent. We also had a stated commitment to broaden our offering to audiences old and new in Melbourne and surrounds.

"That Jo has been able to take on this challenge and produce such a varied and interesting artistic program, having not yet commenced full time in her role as our incoming Artistic Director, is remarkable. It is a sign of exciting times to come for Opera Australia," said Ms Allan.

OA is the first major opera company in the world to have both a female CEO and Artistic Director, which has in turn led to a significant boost in the number of female creatives across the 2024 program. In Victoria this includes directors Kate Gaul and Melbourne Theatre Company's Anne-Louise Sarks, as well as conductor Jessica Cottis, librettist Meredith Oakes and composer Missy Mazzoli, who will become the first international female composer that Opera Australia has worked with.

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CEO Fiona Allan continued, “This has been important to me since joining the company in late 2022, and has already been evidenced in Lindy Hume’s season as guest Creative Director of Sydney summer. Opera Australia is now fully committed to enabling a variety of voices to tell the great stories of opera. It is long overdue.”

The Victorian season begins with the Australian premiere of Opera North’s five-star production **Tosca**, which will become the first opera to ever be performed at Margaret Court Arena. Opera Australia favourites Karah Son, Diego Torre and Warwick Fyfe will perform alongside three new international guest performers; rising Korean tenor Young Woo Kim and British singers Nadine Benjamin MBE and Robert Hayward.

Building on the solid foundation laid with Victorian Opera through the *Idomeneo* co-production, OA and VO will team up again to co-present the world premiere of Sir Jonathan Mills’ new commission **Eucalyptus**. Based on the book by Murray Bail, this production features all-Australian talent, both on and off the Palais Theatre stage, including librettist Meredith Oakes, director Michael Gow and starring Melbourne-based baritone Simon Meadows and South Australian soprano Desiree Frahn.

For the first time, Opera Australia will perform a work by American composer Missy Mazzoli, with librettist Royce Vavrek. Described by Time Out as “Brooklyn’s post-millennial Mozart”, Mazzoli’s operatic adaptation of Lars von Trier’s acclaimed film **Breaking the Waves** will be conducted by Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of Canberra Symphony Orchestra Jessica Cottis, while Melbourne Theatre Company’s Anne-Louise Sarks will direct this exciting new semi-staged production at Hamer Hall.

Internationally acclaimed Australian soprano Nicole Car will join a stellar cast in **The Puccini Gala** at Hamer Hall while the free, outdoor concert **BMW Opera for All** will return to Federation Square to give all opera lovers, and the opera curious, an opportunity to experience a live opera and orchestra performance.

The Geelong Arts Centre will play host to two Victorian premieres; Kate Gaul’s bright new production of Mozart’s great adventure **The Magic Flute**, starring tenor Shanul Sharma, who gave a standout performance in *Satyagraha* earlier this year; and the critically acclaimed **Chorus!** with OA’s own Chorus Master Paul Fitzsimon and the forty-eight-strong Chorus presenting a powerful series of great operatic choral pieces, reminding audiences why this Chorus is hailed as one of the best in the world.

A brand new touring production of **La Bohème** directed by Melbourne-based Dean Bryant, whose credits include Opera Australia’s *Anything Goes* and the Helpmann Award-winning smash hit *Sweet Charity*, will premiere in Dandenong and tour throughout Victoria, including to Nunawading, Horsham, Warrnambool, Bendigo and Sale before continuing on to Tasmania and NSW.

In an exciting cultural coup, Melbourne will host the world premiere of an all-new production of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s **Sunset Boulevard** starring one of musical theatre’s true icons, Sarah Brightman. Returning to the stage for her first musical in almost three decades, this will be musical theatre history in the making.

[Further details about each production and booking info on the following page]

Booking Information

Recent subscribers will receive discount benefits and priority access from 24 Oct - 5 Dec.

New sign ups can access priority presale tickets at opera.org.au/season-2024/victoria-season-2024

Opera Australia Box Office | (03) 9685 3700

Explore the season with our digital brochure opera.org.au/discover-2024

Single tickets on sale from 5 December 2023

www.opera.org.au

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Melbourne 2024

PUCCINI: *Tosca* | Conductor Garry Walker | Director Edward Dick

Tosca will become the first opera ever performed at Melbourne's Margaret Court Arena when leading UK arts company Opera North's spectacular staging of Giacomo Puccini's political thriller *Tosca* makes its Australian debut. Receiving five stars for its dramatic power, director Edward Dick presents Puccini's gripping drama and sensational music amid a blend of Renaissance Roman grandeur and contemporary references in a highly theatrical design by Tom Scutt. **Margaret Court Arena, 24-30 May**

MILLS: *Eucalyptus* | Conductor Tahu Matheson | Director Michael Gow

An exclusive, world premiere of *Eucalyptus*, co-commissioned by Opera Australia and Victorian Opera, composed by Sir Jonathan Mills is part Australian fairy tale, part musical evocation of the Australian bush. The poetic libretto by Meredith Oakes, based on the book by Murray Bail, complements a mysterious, colourful score, telling an ageless story of love and longing. Baritone Simon Meadows and Soprano Desiree Frahn will bring moments of dramatic intensity and hushed beauty to their roles as father and daughter in the second co-production between Opera Australia and Victorian Opera. **Palais Theatre, 16-19 Oct**

MAZZOLI: *Breaking the Waves* | Conductor Jessica Cottis | Director Anne-Louise Sarkis

The operatic adaptation of Lars von Trier's sensational film *Breaking the Waves* by American composer Missy Mazzoli and Canadian librettist Royce Vavrek is set to be an electrifying experience. Melbourne Theatre Company's Anne-Louise Sarkis will direct a new semi-staged production for Opera Australia and Australian-British conductor Jessica Cottis will lead the cast, renowned Opera Australia Chorus and Orchestra Victoria through Mazzoli's score. Superb lyric soprano Jennifer Black will sing Bess and Australian-raised baritone Duncan Rock will play Lars, with Australians Sian Sharp, John Longmuir and Emma Matthews rounding out the cast. The opera previously found success at Edinburgh International Festival, and Adelaide Festival, with Mazzoli dubbed as "Brooklyn's post-millennial Mozart". **Hamer Hall, 26 + 28 July**

PUCCINI | *The Puccini Gala*

The Puccini Gala will celebrate the magnificent composer Giacomo Puccini, who remains one of the most influential opera composers to this day. 100 years after his passing, his works continue to be some of the most performed around the world, including *La Bohème*, *Turandot*, *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly*. In two Melbourne-exclusive concerts, homegrown and internationally in-demand soprano Nicole Car will be joined by some of the world's finest singers, including Australians Peter Coleman-Wright AO and Julie Lea Goodwin, as well as the great Maltese tenor Joseph Calleja. The Gala will be a celebration of Puccini's enduring brilliance, showcasing his greatest works and a rare chance to hear some of his lesser-known gems. **Hamer Hall, 25 + 27 July**

Geelong 2024

MOZART: *The Magic Flute* | Conductor Paul Fitzsimon | Director Kate Gaul

Award-winning Kate Gaul makes her directorial debut at Opera Australia with an enchanting and eclectic production of Mozart's great adventure *The Magic Flute*. Performed in English, audiences will be delighted by this opera's big heart, adventurous spirit and memorable music. Australian soprano Celeste Lazarenko and heavy metal vocalist turned opera star, Shanul Sharma, will join a cast of accomplished singers including Andrew Moran, Esther Song, David Parkin and Jane Ede. This all-Australian cast will perform under the skilled baton of Opera Australia Chorus Master Paul Fitzsimon. **Geelong Arts Centre, 9-16 November**

Chorus! | Conductor Paul Fitzsimon | Director Matthew Barclay

Attracting great acclaim and accolades for many years as one of the best opera choruses in the world, the renowned Opera Australia Chorus will have the spotlight all to themselves in an hour-long showcase of great operatic choral pieces. Led by Chorus Master Paul Fitzsimon, forty-eight Opera Australia choristers will explore the vast musical terrain of opera repertoire in a unique musical and theatrical experience. **Geelong Arts Centre, 13-15 November**

Musical 2024

LLOYD WEBBER: *Sunset Boulevard* | Director Paul Warwick Griffin

One of musical theatre’s true icons, Sarah Brightman, will star in the world premiere of a new production of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s masterpiece *Sunset Boulevard*. Sarah reached global stardom when she played Christine in *The Phantom of the Opera*, a role designed to showcase her unique gifts. Now she returns to the stage for her first musical in almost three decades, singing Lloyd Webber’s beautiful melodies once more. **Princess Theatre, from May 2024**

Free Event

BMW Opera for All | Conductor Brian Castles-Onion

A free, open-air concert in the beating heart of Melbourne’s CBD, the *BMW Opera for All* global concert series returns to Federation Square in 2024 for what is becoming a popular annual event. Opera Australia and Orchestra Victoria will treat the audience to a selection of the most popular arias, recognisable to opera lovers and total newcomers alike. Led by the ever-entertaining Brian Castles-Onion AM this is an opportunity for everyone to experience the magic of opera. **Federation Square, 3 February**

National Tour 2024

PUCCHINI: *La Bohème* | Director Dean Bryant

A new production will breathe fresh life into one of the world’s favourite operas. Award-winning director Dean Bryant brings his trademark wit and vivacity to a new staging of *La Bohème* with set and costume designer Isabel Hudson and lighting designer Damien Cooper. Known for drawing on emotions that only music can express, this bohemian love story will touch hearts across Victoria, Tasmania and NSW on Opera Australia’s annual national tour.

La Bohème is touring throughout Victoria in 2024, including to Dandenong, Horsham, Warrnambool, Sale, Nunawading and Bendigo, dates available at opera.org.au/on-tour.

Ends.