

MEDIA RELEASE

28 May 2024

Neil Armfield’s critically acclaimed *Watershed* to premiere at the Sydney Opera House

14 – 16 June 2024 | Joan Sutherland Theatre, Sydney Opera House



“If I could, I would give it six stars” (Limelight)

The recipient of five-star reviews and emotional standing ovations at its sold-out premiere season at the 2022 Adelaide Festival, Neil Armfield’s acclaimed opera *Watershed: The Death of Dr Duncan* will make its Sydney debut with Opera Australia in June.

An operatic oratorio, *Watershed* is based on the tragic true story of the 1972 drowning of Dr George Duncan, a University of Adelaide law lecturer, the alleged police cover-up and subsequent public outrage that followed.

With NSW marking the 40th Anniversary of the decriminalisation of homosexuality this year, the Sydney season is a timely reminder of the appalling series of circumstances, the horror and heartbreak that ultimately led to South Australia becoming the first Australian state to implement homosexual law reform.

Director Neil Armfield explains, “We commissioned *Watershed* to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of Dr Duncan in Adelaide, allegedly at the hands of off-duty members of the SA Police vice squad engaging in their habitual practice of ‘teaching the poofers to swim’.

“(Adelaide) Festival audiences found it a shattering experience: at the end of each performance many remained in their seats, not able yet to go out and look down through their tears to Karrawirri parri - the River Torrens - where this act of casual murder took place. It’s a vocal work of stirring and glorious beauty.

“In the wake of the recent NSW Special Commission of Inquiry into gay and transgender hate crimes, and the consequent shadow that fell on our police, this couldn’t be more relevant to us in Sydney today.”

Armfield leads a team of acclaimed artistic talents in this thrillingly physical oratorio featuring powerful choral music, solo voices and dance.

Starring Australian tenor Mark Oates and bass Pelham Andrews both reprising their roles from the 2022 season, along with multidisciplinary performer Tomáš Kantor and WAAPA-trained Macon Escobal Riley and the Opera Australia Chorus.

Multi-award-winning author Christos Tsiolkas and playwright Alana Valentine fuse press clippings, inquest transcripts, private correspondence and monologues spanning five decades of anti-gay violence to craft a searing libretto.

Designers Alisa Paterson, Nigel Levings, Jane Rossetto and Sean Bacon recreate the simple but effecting scene by Adelaide’s River Torrens, with Joseph Twist’s luscious, transcendent score played by the Opera Australia Orchestra under the baton of one of Australia’s foremost choral conductors, Brett Weymark.

PATRON-IN-CHIEF
DR HARUHISA HANDA

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Creatives

Composer & Orchestrator **Joseph Twist**
 Libretto **Alana Valentine & Christos Tsiolkas**
 Conductor **Brett Weymark**
 Director **Neil Armfield**
 Associate Director **Cheryl Pickering**
 Set & Costume Designer **Alisa Paterson**
 Lighting Designer **Nigel Levings**
 Sound Designer **Jane Rossetto**
 Video Designer **Sean Bacon**
 Choreographer **Lewis Major**
 Historical Consultant **Tim Reeves**

Cast

Duncan/Dunstan **Mark Oates**
 Mick O’Shea/Cop/Lawyer **Pelham Andrews**
 Lost Boy **Tomáš Kantor**
 Dancer **Macon Escobal Riley**

Opera Australia Chorus
Opera Australia Orchestra

Bookings

Adult tickets from \$69 (fees may apply)

Opera Australia Box Office
 (02) 9318 8200
www.opera.org.au

**Joan Sutherland Theatre,
 Sydney Opera House**

Media enquiries

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Performance information

Evenings at 7.30pm

June 14, 15

Saturday Matinee at 12.30pm

June 15

Sunday Matinee at 2.00pm

June 16

Running time

Approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes

Performed in English

Please note this production contains strong sexual references and explicit language.

Production Partners

Opera Australia and Sydney Opera House by arrangement with Adelaide Festival present Watershed.

Enabled by Sydney Opera House donor Professor Ross Steele AM and New Work Now donors.

Co-commissioned by Feast Festival, Adelaide Festival and State Opera South Australia, supported by Arts South Australia and by the Adelaide Festival’s Commissioning Circle, Sidney Myer Fund and Nunn Dimos Foundation.