

O|PERA AUSTRALIA



2025 ANNUAL REPORT



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.

TABLE OF
CONTENTS

**WELCOME TO
 OPERA AUSTRALIA**

Our company	5
Chair's report	6
CEO's report	7

ARTFORM

Productions and attendees	9
In summary	10
Performing in Sydney	11
Performing in Melbourne	16
Presenting new productions	20
Presenting new work	21
Celebrating our Chorus and Orchestra	23
Producing and presenting musical theatre	25
Nurturing and supporting young artists	28

AUDIENCE

In summary	33
Growing and diversifying audiences	34
Exploring new partnerships	36
Staging free community events	38
Touring opera nationally	40

COMPANY

In summary	44
Our strategic ambition	46
Towards reconciliation	47
In summary	49
Fostering a love of music and song	50
Training with us	52
Sharing our resources	53
Celebrating our achievements	55
Acknowledging our team	57
Paying tribute to our donors and partners	63
Donors	64
Partners	67
Opera Australia Capital Fund Chairman's report	68

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.

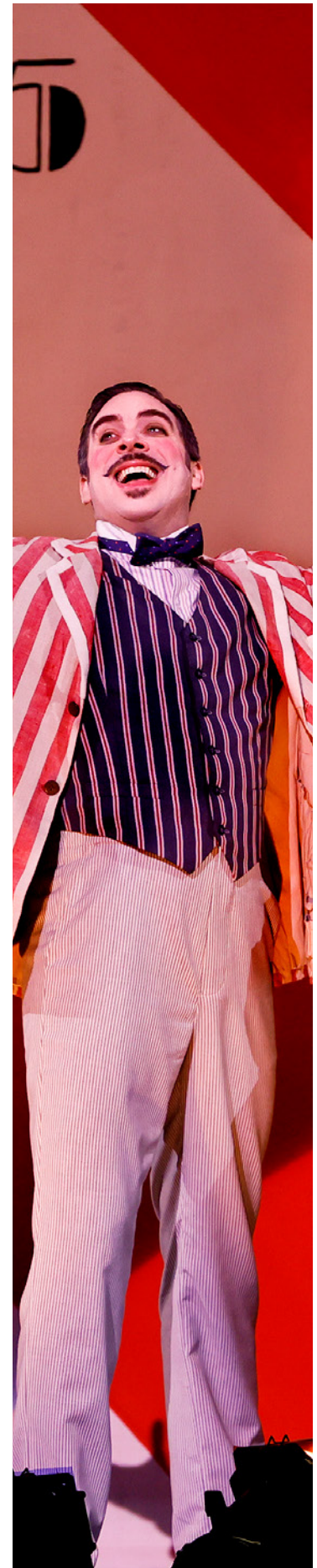
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Professor Glyn Davis AC,
Chair (appointed 2025)
Deena Shiff, Deputy Chair
Andrew Sisson AO, Deputy Chair
Professor Warren Bebbington AM
Greta Bradman AM
Warwick Bray
Jonathan Feder
Jane Hansen AO
Michelle Kam

EXECUTIVE TEAM

Alex Budd, Chief Executive Officer
Amy Lane, Director of Opera
(appointed 2026)
Andrea Battistoni, Music Director
(appointed 2025)

Taylor Brook, Acting Finance Director
Joanne Goodman,
Artistic Administration Director
Rebecca Kitelinger, Development Director
Simon Meilak,
Marketing and Communications Director
Ryan Paine, Acting Technical Director
(December 2025 to June 2026)
Chris Yates, Technical Director
(until December 2025)
Roxanne Smith, Incoming Technical
Director (from June 2026)
Amanda Smith, Head of People
Ruth Thomas,
Planning and Programming Director





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 Arts Centre Melbourne, and in other major cities and regional locations across Australia.

As the largest performing arts employer in Australia's \$64 billion cultural and creative industries, in 2025 we were proud to support a workforce of 1,371 people – over half of whom were artists and musicians, and with almost a third of them technical and production employees supporting our performances. Our company includes singers, conductors, orchestral musicians, language 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 that 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 with our Opera Conference partners, Opera Queensland, State Opera South Australia, and West Australian Opera. We work with Victorian Opera, Orchestra Victoria, and The Australian Ballet. We enjoy a close relationship with Pinchgut Opera, with us at The Opera Centre. Opera Australia also supports smaller performing arts organisations and collaborates 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 celebrate our 70th birthday in 2026, we look forward to captivating audiences with more spectacular performances and opening opera up to newcomers to experience extraordinary stories shared through music and song.

It was an honour to return as Chair at Opera Australia in August 2025. I found the company focused on strengthening its financial position and building reserves, while continuing to deliver a full national program. It is a pleasure once again to work with such extraordinary people, supported by a passionate and dedicated community that has a deeply held commitment to bringing great opera to Australian audiences. These are the foundations on which renewal is built.

I am pleased to report that 2025 was a year of meaningful financial progress, marking a significant turnaround from the 2024 result. Total revenue reached \$122.8 million, with Opera Australia delivering a break-even outcome for the 2025 financial year. On a consolidated basis, inclusive of the Opera Australia Capital Fund, the Group recorded a surplus of \$3.6 million.

This outcome reflects disciplined decision-making across the company, improved cost control, and a renewed focus on financial sustainability. These efforts, underpinned by the strong repertoire of work, have strengthened the company's financial position.

The Board has been deeply engaged in this renewal, and I thank former Chair Rod Sims AO for his commitment to a much-improved 2025 result, and former Acting CEO Simon Militano, who worked closely with the Executive Team to ensure 2025 proved a year of consolidation. The Board has strengthened its governance frameworks and financial oversight, and in 2026 – our 70th anniversary year – we revisit our strategic plan.

None of this progress happens without the sustained support of the Federal Government through Creative Australia, and our State Government partners Create NSW, Destination NSW,

and Creative Victoria. Nor without the generosity of our donors, patrons, and corporate partners, including Hero Partners HSBC and Qantas, along with BMW, which makes possible our free Opera for All concert in Federation Square in Melbourne each year. Our thanks to Patron-in-Chief Dr Haruhisa Handa and the International Foundation for Arts and Culture, whose commitment to Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour is longstanding.

In November, a refreshed and strengthened leadership team was formed, as Alex Budd and Andrea Battistoni joined Opera Australia as Chief Executive Officer and Music Director respectively. The announcement of Amy Lane as Director of Opera has since followed, and she commences with the company in September 2026. We are all honoured to continue working with the exceptional artists, musicians, creatives, and arts workers who are the cornerstone of Australia's national opera company.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Glyn Davis', written in a cursive style.

PROFESSOR GLYN DAVIS AC, CHAIR

April 2026



Opera Australia is the national opera company. It is a major cultural institution, and the largest performing arts organisation in the country. In 2025, that translated into 457 performances across 12 operas, nine concerts, and four musicals, reaching more than 570,000 people in Sydney, Melbourne, and on the National Tour. Box office rose 29% on the previous year.

2025 was a year in which Opera Australia regained its footing. The company improved its financial position, re-established discipline in its operations and delivered, with critical and audience acclaim, a national program at scale.

The 2025 financial results represent a material improvement on 2024, with strong financial performance at a program level, further strengthened on a consolidated basis, inclusive of the Opera Australia Capital Fund. This progress underscores a more sustainable financial outlook for the company.

While this report rightly celebrates what was achieved on stage and in communities, Opera Australia's financial recovery of 2025 is a beginning, not an endpoint. Such progress carries greater responsibility. This is a company that develops artists, builds new work, maintains a repertoire, and presents across the country to audiences that have different expectations and points

of access. We continue to invest in the next generation of artists through our training and fellowship programs, and in 2025 reintroduced a national Education, Learning and Participation program, extending our reach into communities across metropolitan, regional, and remote Australia.

From here, the focus turns to the work itself. The productions we stage, the artists we support, and the audiences we reach and reflect. That includes broadening the range of voices in the repertoire, and ensuring the company speaks clearly to contemporary Australia while maintaining the depth and rigour that defines the artform.

A company of this scale cannot rely on box office alone. Strengthening philanthropy, partnerships, commercial activity, and government investment remains essential to sustaining activity at this level. In 2025, Opera Australia engaged with government on tax reform and philanthropy. The development of a new National Cultural Policy, alongside initiatives such as the NSW Government's Creative Statement to Parliament and Victoria's Creative State strategy, presents an important opportunity to shape the future of the creative sector, and its place in our national life.

These settings are vital to the sustainability of the company and will influence what is created, who it reaches, and how culture connects across the country. We look forward to playing an active role.

I am grateful for the counsel and support of the Chair and Board as I commenced as CEO, and I thank the entire Opera Australia team – its artists, musicians, technical staff, and administrators – for their commitment. It is a privilege for all of us to contribute to this company, and a responsibility we take seriously. On that note, I acknowledge former Technical Director Chris Yates's two illustrious tenures with Opera Australia – the first from 1988 to 2013 and the second for the past three years. Reflecting on his dedication to the company, which was recognised with an Opera Australia Medal, in December we bid a bittersweet farewell to our esteemed colleague.

To our audiences, donors, government investors, and partners: your belief in, and support of, this extraordinary artform makes everything possible.

ALEX BUDD, CEO

April 2026

ARTFORM



Abraham Bretón as Don José and Danielle de Niese as Carmen in Opera Australia's new production of *Carmen*, 2025. Photo: Keith Saunders

PRODUCTIONS AND ATTENDEES

ANASTASIA REGENT THEATRE, MELBOURNE	19,818
THE BARBER OF SEVILLE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	18,692
REGENT THEATRE, MELBOURNE	6,936
BMW OPERA FOR ALL FED SQUARE, MELBOURNE	3,800
LA BOHÈME SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	14,676
LA BOHÈME NATIONAL TOUR: ACT, NSW, NT, QLD, VIC, WA	9,355
THE CANBERRA GALA CONCERT CANBERRA THEATRE CENTRE	1,147
CANDIDE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	10,131
CARMEN SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	34,529
REGENT THEATRE, MELBOURNE	13,333
CINDERELLA (CENDRILLON) SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	29,362
DIDO & AENEAS SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	8,760
DURUFLÉ REQUIEM ST JAMES CHURCH, SYDNEY	751
GREAT OPERA HITS CONCERTS SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	47,899
GUYS & DOLLS HANDA OPERA ON SYDNEY HARBOUR	48,804
HADESTOWN THEATRE ROYAL SYDNEY	83,835
HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE, MELBOURNE	103,031
MADAMA BUTTERFLY ON NEW YEAR'S EVE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	1,286
THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	12,370
MOZART REQUIEM CITY RECITAL HALL, SYDNEY	1,120
THE OPERA GALA CONCERT ON NEW YEAR'S EVE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	2,033
OPERA UP LATE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	1,433
REGENT THEATRE, MELBOURNE	1,313
ORPHEUS & EURYDICE REGENT THEATRE, MELBOURNE	6,429
RENT SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	50,361
RUSALKA SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	10,651
STRICTLY BAZ LUHRMANN SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	3,629
LA TRAVIATA SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE	25,286
THE VERDI GALA CONCERT ARTS CENTRE MELBOURNE	4,039
TOTAL ATTENDEES	574,809

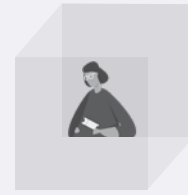
IN SUMMARY



25
TOTAL
PRODUCTIONS



457
TOTAL
PERFORMANCES



\$65.3M
TOTAL
BOX OFFICE



12
OPERAS



9
CONCERTS
AND RECITALS



4
MUSICALS



15
NATIONAL
TOUR
LOCATIONS



19
NATIONAL
TOUR
PERFORMANCES



9,163
NATIONAL
TOUR
ATTENDEES



158
NATIONAL TOUR
CHILDREN'S CHORUS
MEMBERS FROM
LOCAL COMMUNITIES



138 of 155
AUSTRALIAN CAST
AND CONDUCTORS
IN KEY ROLES



9
PRODUCTIONS
NEW
TO AUSTRALIA



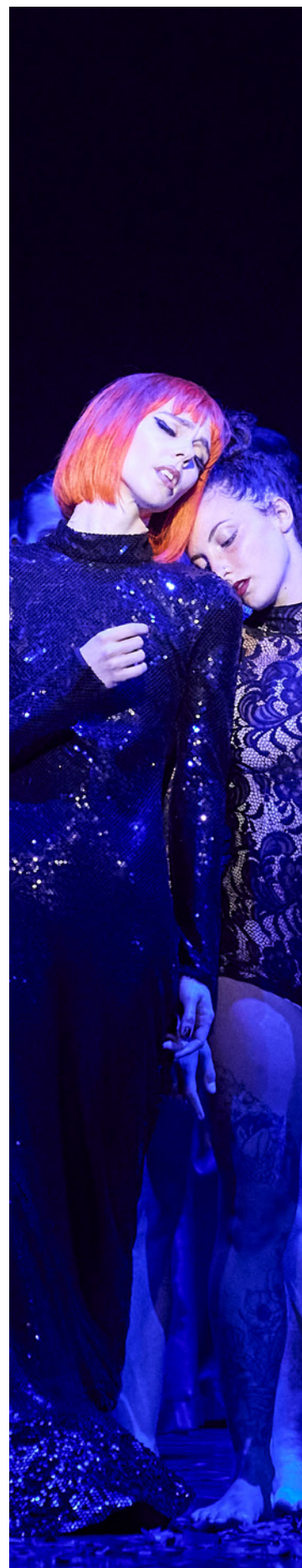
31
ARTS COMPANIES
COLLABORATED WITH
ON PRODUCTIONS

Sydney performances throughout 2025 saw many highlights. The year got off to a magical start with our first-ever staging of Jules Massenet's family-friendly fairytale opera *Cinderella* (*Cendrillon*). A world-class Australian cast brought an English-language version of French director Laurent Pelly's production to local audiences for the very first time. The visually stunning production, underpinned by seamless technical skill, was the perfect complement to the playful comic opera. The masterful set, the inspired work of Paris-based set designer Barbara de Limburg, was conceived in the form of a pop-up storybook, complete with fold-out balcony and playful cut-out carriage. Enveloped in magical lighting designed by Duane Schuler and draped in sumptuous costumes of outlandish proportions designed by Pelly, the performers appeared like characters plucked from the pages of a storybook-like set and brought to life.

A delightful work for young and old, *Cinderella* featured a strong female principal cast. Four exceptional Australian women took the lead: mezzo-soprano Emily Edmonds made her OA principal role debut as Cinderella; much in demand in Europe, Margaret Plummer made a welcome return to the local stage as Prince Charming, sharing the "pants role" with dynamic OA principal singer Sian Sharp. Soprano Emma Matthews bewitched audiences in the role of Fairy Godmother, while the haughty role of the Wicked Stepmother was shared by Angela Hogan and Dominica Matthews. Ashlyn Tymms made her OA principal role debut as one of the stepsisters, playing alongside OA favourites Jennifer Black and Jane Ede. Conducting the work and making his OA debut was Evan Rogister. Later performances were conducted by OA's Head of Music, Tahu Matheson.

It was thanks to Opera Australia's strong global opera house partnerships that this production of *Cinderella* was brought to our shores. After full houses at the Metropolitan Opera in New York and the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, Pelly's acclaimed staging in Australia required the set to be adapted in order to fit it to the smaller scale dimensions of the Joan Sutherland Theatre. Reflecting back on the start of 2025, Productions Manager Chris Potter pinpointed *Cinderella* as one of the most challenging productions for all the OA departments, not least the OA Workshop and Scenic Artists. In the end the production's triumph on the Sydney Opera House stage was a testament to the loving care invested by all involved and left audiences enchanted by its authenticity and beauty.

The charms and delights continued with our production of *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Sydney Opera House in July. International singers Gordon Bintner and Michael Sumuel performed the roles of Count Almaviva and Figaro, and were joined by a strong line-up of local stars that included Kiandra Howarth and Jane Ede, who shared the role of the Countess; Siobhan Stagg, who made her OA debut in the role of Susanna; and Emily Edmonds, who took on the trouser role of Cherubino, following her OA debut as Cinderella earlier in the year.



“The whole production was great - costumes, comic performances, drama. I took my 13-year-old granddaughter, and we both loved it.”

AUDIENCE MEMBER, CINDERELLA



Jennifer Black as Noémie and Ashlyn Tymms as Dorothée in *Cinderella (Cendrillon)*, 2025. Photo: Rhiannon Hopley



July also brought Australian-born, international soprano sensation Nicole Car back to the Joan Sutherland Theatre with the staging of Antonin Dvořák's shimmering opera *Rusalka*. Car debuted in the title role in award-winning director Sarah Giles's new Opera Conference production. The performances in Sydney, conducted by Johannes Fritzsich, followed the production's premiere in Perth in 2024 by West Australian Opera. 2025 was a busy year for Giles, who also directed *La Traviata* for Opera Australia in Sydney and will do so in Melbourne in 2026. Working with set designer Charles Davis and costume designer Renée Mulder, Giles' production immersed audiences in a world of light, shadow, magic, and, in the end, tragedy.

Rusalka, which was last staged by Opera Australia 18 years ago, tells the fairy tale story of Rusalka, a water nymph, who forfeits her voice and immortality in order

to be transformed into a human. Rusalka willingly makes this sacrifice to win the heart of a prince with whom she's fallen in love. But on becoming human, the romance turns into heartbreak all too soon, as Rusalka's beloved Prince betrays her.

Rusalka represented a long-awaited return for Nicole Car to the operatic stage in Sydney. As a 2013 OA Young Artist alumna, Car has a long and special connection with our company, but being in high demand internationally, she hadn't performed in an OA opera for some years. Audiences and fellow OA cast and crew were delighted to welcome her back to the Joan Sutherland Theatre in 2025. "It was such a beautiful welcome home-coming," Car enthused. "I debuted at the Opera House when I was 25, so to come back for *Rusalka* and show the skills that I've learnt and everything that I have worked on in between was incredibly special."

“*Nicole Car dazzles in Sarah Giles’s five-star staging of Dvořák’s masterpiece - the best in decades.*”

LIMELIGHT MAGAZINE

Joining *Car* on stage was a phenomenal local cast, including Austrian-Australian tenor Gerard Schneider, making his OA debut in the role of the Prince; Australian baritone Warwick Fyfe as the Water King; Armenian-Australian soprano Natalie Aroyan as the Duchess; and Australian mezzo-soprano Ashlyn Tymms as Ježibaba.

February and March saw the Sydney premiere staging of Victorian Opera’s production of Leonard Bernstein’s satirical operetta *Candide*, an operatic romp and coming-of-age story. Directed by Dean Bryant and packed with effervescent wit and humour, this eclectic mix of opera and musical theatre took audiences on a journey into a world gone mad populated by immoral, materialistic, and deceitful characters before the unblinking hero, *Candide*, ultimately discovers what it is to be human.

Headlining *Candide* were multi-talented performer and composer Eddie Perfect, who took on the roles of both Dr Pangloss and the narrator Voltaire, and musical theatre star Lyndon Watts, who made his opera principal debut in the title role. Together with the entire cast, OA Chorus, and OA Orchestra, it was a magnificent performance of brilliant music and impeccable comic timing. Set and costume designer Dann Barber let his imagination go wild, conjuring up a bizarre world of frenzied fashion. Wielding the baton for the production was Brett Weymark OA, one of the country’s foremost choral conductors and veteran conductor of the Sydney Philharmonia Choirs, a fellow resident company of the Sydney Opera House.

In 2025 we deepened our commitment to collaborative staging, presenting the Sydney premiere of Opera Queensland’s production of Henry Purcell’s *Dido & Aeneas*. Directed by Yaron Lifschitz, Artistic Director of Circa contemporary circus, *Dido & Aeneas* merged the dynamic physicality of Circa’s performers and virtuosic musicianship of Opera Australia against Lifschitz’s striking set to create a contemporary operatic retelling of the ancient Greek myth. The OA Orchestra was conducted jointly by the Artistic Director of Pinchgut Opera, Erin Helyard, and British maestro Chad Kelly, while the all-Australian cast was led by mezzo-soprano Anna Dowsley in the role of Dido and tenor Nicholas Jones as Aeneas. Joining them on stage were OA principals Jane Ede, Sian Sharp, Angela Hogan, and Cathy-Di Zhang, and the OA Chorus.



Annie Aitken as Cunegonde in *Candide*, 2025. Photo: Carlita Sari

“A magisterial marvel: Opera Australia’s collaboration with Circa breathes dazzling new life into Gluck’s mythology-mining *Orpheus & Eurydice*.”

ARTSHUB



Opera Australia’s 2025 Melbourne season featured an array of performances of note. It included Elijah Moshinsky’s celebrated production of Rossini’s delightful masterpiece *The Barber of Seville*. Moshinsky’s energetic staging blended opera and slapstick, placing the action in a world inspired by 1920s silent films. The playful comedy, which unfolded on Michael Yeargan’s vibrant, life-size dolls house set, made for a captivating performance.

The season also showcased a stunning new production of Georges Bizet’s *Carmen* in the Regent Theatre following its premiere at the Sydney Opera House in July. Directed by Anne-Louise Sarks, Melbourne Theatre Company’s artistic director, with vibrant and ornate sets and costumes crafted by Tony Award-winning designer Marg Horwell,

Carmen offered a bold, 21st-century take on the now-classic opera. Sharing the title role were Melbourne-born, internationally celebrated performer Danielle de Niese and OA leading principal mezzo-soprano and seasoned talent Sian Sharp. Making his Melbourne debut was Mexican-Spanish tenor Abraham Bretón, who shared the role of Don José with leading OA tenor Diego Torre.

Another highlight in Melbourne in 2025 was *Orpheus & Eurydice*, as Opera Australia and Edinburgh International Festival presented Opera Queensland’s production of the classic Gluck opera. Presented in association with Australia’s outstanding contemporary circus troupe Circa, the production defied genres and gravity, combining breathtaking acrobatics

and lyrical music to tell the tragic tale of Orpheus's descent into Hades to rescue his beloved Eurydice and bring her back to the world of the living. The heartbreaking catch: Orpheus must not look at Eurydice or she will die.

The brainchild of Circa's Artistic Director Yaron Lifschitz, the visually stunning production was thoroughly mesmerising and provided a powerful complement to Gluck's unforgettable music. British countertenor Iestyn Davies starred as Orpheus alongside Australian soprano Samantha Clarke, who made her role debut singing both Eurydice and Amor, all under the trusty baton of conductor Dane Lam.

Following highly acclaimed performances in Edinburgh, Brisbane, and Perth and sell-out shows for the Opera Australia co-production with Sydney Festival in 2024, Lifschitz's soaring 2025 production scored rave reviews. *Arts Hub* gave it five stars and declared it "enthralingly contemporary and mesmerising in its mythic bones, this new staging is at once

the future of opera and the very essence of the eternal." *Orpheus & Eurydice* also took out two major gongs at the 43rd Annual Green Room Awards, winning two awards for Outstanding Direction and Outstanding Production in the Opera category.

Following our sold-out Puccini Gala Concert in 2024, for 2025 we turned the spotlight on Giuseppe Verdi. Hosted by Greta Bradman AM, the Verdi Gala Concert showcased rousing music from several of the Italian composer's iconic operas, including *Il Trovatore* and *Rigoletto*, alongside some of his less familiar masterpieces. Headlining the concert series were Melbourne-born Nicole Car, whose stunning voice and magnetic stage presence have made her an international star; French-Canadian baritone Étienne Dupuis – who also happens to be Nicole's husband and an opera superstar in his own right; and celebrated Australian tenor Paul O'Neill. The performances brought Orchestra Victoria out of the pit and onto the stage of Hamer Hall, highlighting every rich detail in Verdi's luscious orchestrations.



Celebrated Australian tenor Paul O'Neill performs in The Verdi Gala Melbourne, 2025. Photo: Jeff Busby



Mezzo-soprano Helen Sherman (seated) and members of the Opera Australia Chorus in the new production of *Carmen*, 2025.
Photo: Keith Saunders

PERFORMING IN MELBOURNE

In 2025 Opera Up Late was unleashed on audiences in Melbourne. The evening showcased a diverse repertoire of revamped opera classics, musical theatre favourites, and generous lashings of pop in a genre-defying, wildly outrageous, queer-inspired show at the Regent Theatre. Opera Up Late is the product

of the collaborative genius of Melbourne-born, international comedy and cabaret icon Reuben Kaye and award-winning director Shaun Rennie. Sharing the glittering limelight on stage alongside Kaye was a line-up of Opera Australia performers, including the multi-award-winning soprano Emma Matthews.



Melbourne-born Reuben Kaye in Opera Up Late at the Regent Theatre, 2025. Photo: Cameron Grant Parenthesis

Georges Bizet's *Carmen* has always been an opera ahead of its time. When it premiered in Paris 150 years ago, *Carmen* was roundly denounced for its shocking depiction of working-class life, immorality, and lawlessness, and for the on-stage murder of its main character. Tragically, Bizet would not live long enough to see the pendulum swing in his favour but the work subsequently went on to spark a revolution in the artform, becoming one of the world's most popular operas.

Recapturing *Carmen*'s original cutting-edge energy, Anne-Louise Sarks' innovative interpretation was an adrenaline-pumping ride through lust, jealousy, and spectacle that effectively highlighted the work's ongoing relevance to our contemporary world. As the powerful set designed by Marg Horwell made clear, *Carmen* is a story that carries tragic resonance through to our own time as women continue to suffer domestic abuse and violence. Sarks' confronting production asked timely and urgent questions about gender, class, and race. There is no happy ending to *Carmen*. But in Sarks' retelling, the iconic femme fatale figure, whose dance with destiny ends in disaster, is a woman with agency.

In 2025 we further embraced cultural reinvention and innovation with *Dido & Aeneas*. Henry Purcell's opera was injected with the awe-inspiring acrobatics of Circa in Opera Queensland's unique rendition of the mythical fable, presented by Opera Australia. The roots of this opera's epic tale are of course ancient and over the centuries the story has been told and retold. Famously recounted in Virgil's *Aeneid*, the first tellings of the story likely extend back even further to the 6th century BCE. The tale was picked up in the 17th century by Purcell, becoming the English composer's most famous opera. *Dido & Aeneas* is also distinguished by being among the first attempts to compose an opera in the English language.

Mixing baroque opera with circus acrobatics, visionary director Yaron Lifschitz's production offered a highly original take. The character of Dido, portrayed by mezzo-soprano Anna

“[This] feminist take on opera’s notorious femme fatale has swagger and style.”

THE GUARDIAN

Dowsley, appeared as a 1940s cabaret artist, transforming on stage into the Sorceress. The Circa ensemble injected high energy and gravity-defying athleticism into the punchy drama, all set against Lifschitz's minimalist backdrop. With screens flying in and out with projected texts reflecting on themes of love, duty, and fortune, *Dido & Aeneas* offered opera-goers an unforgettable experience.

For the new Opera Conference production of *Rusalka*, which West Australian Opera premiered in 2024, Opera Australia displayed the co-operative and generative approach to collaboration that is an ever-growing hallmark of the company. The imaginative set design of Charles Davis was built by Opera Australia, while the fantastically odd costumes designed by Renée Mulder were realised by Opera Queensland. *Rusalka* is widely considered Dvořák's magnum opus, composed at the dawning of the twentieth century. The inspired production symbolically highlights Czech cultural influence in Australia, and on opening night in Sydney we were delighted to host Her Excellency Ms Jana Tyrer, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Australia, along with Marketa Dvořák, the composer's great-great-granddaughter.

“We are honouring the European grand opera tradition. We are also honouring Australia’s grand and ancient storytelling - First Nations storytelling: placing the story on Country, giving it a heartbeat through language, through movement, and through spirituality.”

LEAH PURCELL AM, LIBRETTIST AND DIRECTOR,
THE DROVER’S WIFE - THE OPERA

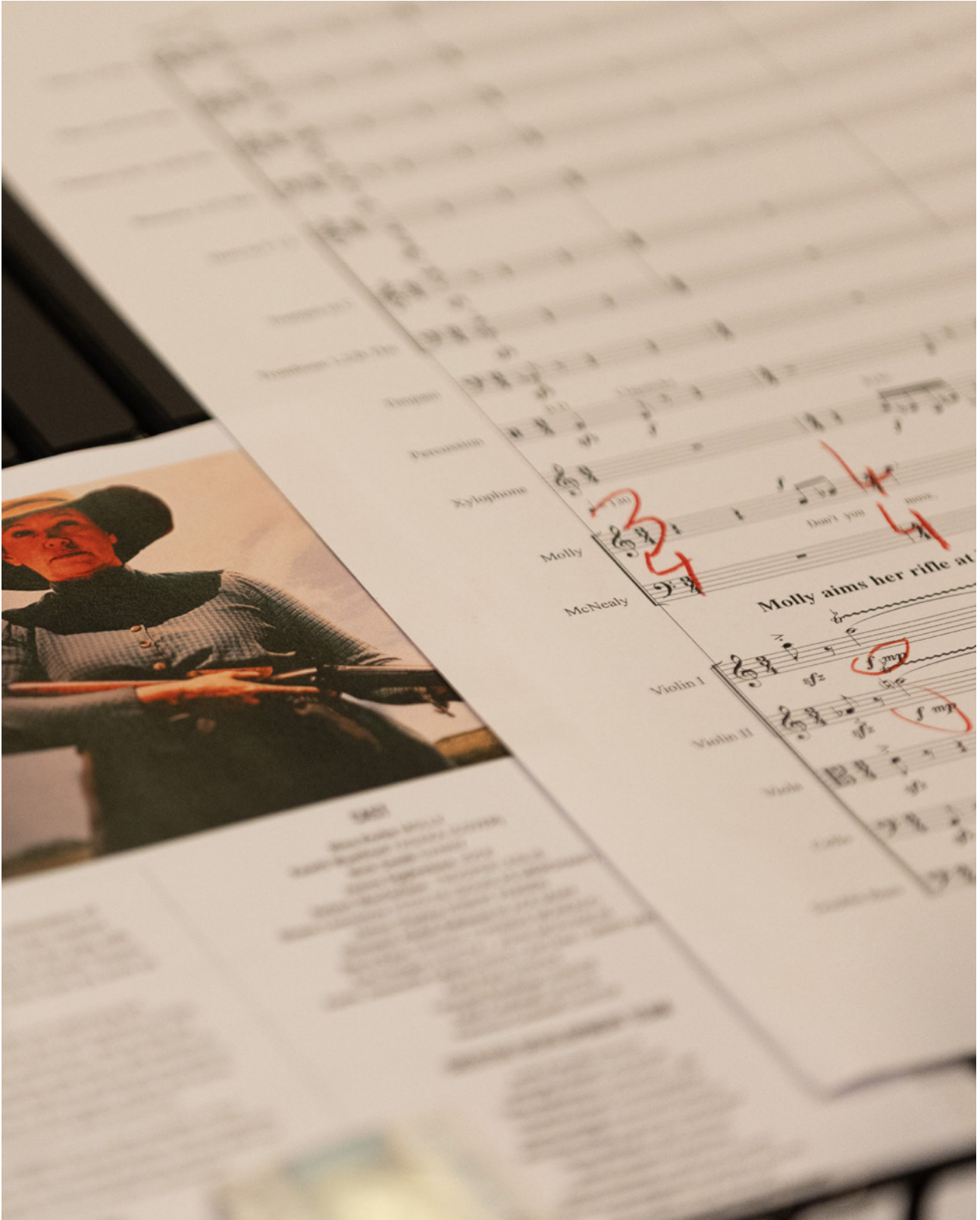


Co-commissioned by Queensland Performing Arts Centre and Opera Australia, *The Drover’s Wife - The Opera* is a monumental new Australian work. Based on the 2016 play *The Drover’s Wife* written by Leah Purcell AM, a proud Goa, Gunggari, Wakka Wakka Murri woman from Queensland and multi-talented playwright, actor, director, filmmaker, producer, screenwriter, and author, the opera is loosely inspired by Henry Lawson’s 1892 short story of the same name. Set in the 1890s, it tells the story of Molly Johnson, a resourceful woman who lives in a remote homestead in the unforgiving terrain of the Snowy Mountains. With her husband away droving for long periods, Molly is regularly left to care for their children alone in the family’s simple shack in the isolated High Country. One day, heavily pregnant Molly encounters Yadaka, an Aboriginal man on the run from colonial authorities. In the days that follow, trauma and brutal truths come to the surface, changing lives forever.

Originally commissioned and produced as a play by Belvoir in association with Oombarra Productions through the Balnaves Foundation Indigenous Playwright’s Award, *The Drover’s Wife - The Opera* is a powerful postcolonial, feminist re-imagining of the Australian classic with an epic score composed by George Palmer AM and libretto written by Purcell with Palmer.

Purcell, who will direct the production in 2026, describes the many years that have gone into developing this groundbreaking new work that brings contemporary First Nations storytelling to the traditions of grand opera: “For the past three years, we’ve been working very hard to bring this opera to fruition,” she says. “For me, *The Drover’s Wife* is a cultural conversation between very old storytelling artforms.” The result, she says, is “a raw, bold, deeply human and uniquely Australian opera.” Ahead of the first run-through with the full orchestra, which took place in September, Purcell expressed her excitement: “The final piece of the puzzle is the play-through of the score by the full orchestra,” she said. “I’m so looking forward to hearing that and being informed by the musicality, and what that will do to the opera.”

Preparations on *The Drover’s Wife* continued throughout 2025, with a two-week creative development in Brisbane in April and orchestral readings in Sydney with the OA Orchestra in September. Programmed as part of the 2026 winter season, the new opera is set for its world premiere at QPAC’s Glasshouse Theatre in Brisbane in May 2026, followed by performances at the Sydney Opera House in August.



The Drover's Wife – The Opera score, 2025. Photo: David Kelly

*“A wonderful night!
The singers and musicians
were at the top of their form.
The production was flawless.
I felt very welcomed.”*

AUDIENCE MEMBER,
CANBERRA GALA CONCERT

Throughout 2025, the OA Orchestra and Chorus brought their virtuosity and flair to a diverse program of opera, musical theatre, and concerts. Our brilliant and hardworking artists showcased their gifts in a variety of performances and venues, further cementing their reputation as the essential backbone of our productions.

In October their exceptional talents were on full display in Canberra at a special, one-night-only Gala Concert to celebrate the 60th birthday of Canberra Theatre Centre, Australia’s first multi-venue performing arts centre. We were delighted to co-produce this event with Canberra Theatre Centre, headlining the celebration of this significant milestone. For the first time in the company’s history the full OA Orchestra and Chorus and six of our company’s principal artists toured to the nation’s capital. The occasion also marked OA’s first mainstage return to Canberra in 40 years. The 80-strong touring troupe charmed the audience with a delectable array of musical treats, conducted by Opera Australia’s Head of Music, Tahu Matheson. Compered by journalist Laura Tingle and directed by OA Young Artist Claudia Osborne, the evening featured stirring performances of works by Wagner, Mozart, Bizet, and Gounod. A particular highlight was a violin showcase by Concertmaster Matthieu Arama. The spectacular springtime concert also fittingly capped off the tenure of Alex Budd as Director of the Canberra Theatre Centre and marked his transition to his current role as CEO of Opera Australia.

In May the OA Chorus appeared at Sydney’s historic St James’ Church for concert performances of Maurice

Durufié’s meditative Requiem. Combining elements of medieval melodies from the Mass for the Dead and more modern impressionistic harmonies, Durufié’s 1947 work is a sublime masterpiece of layered vocals that makes the heart and spirit soar. Conducted by Chorus Master Paul Fitzsimon, the Chorus was joined by talented keyboardist Chad Kelly on the church’s glorious Dobson Bicentennial Pipe Organ. Originally programmed as a one-night-only event, a second performance was added to meet overwhelming demand.

October was a busy month. The Orchestra and Chorus delivered a one-night-only performance of Mozart’s Requiem in D Minor along with a series of orchestral works. Conducted by Tahu Matheson and Paul Fitzsimons, the concert at Sydney’s City Recital Hall was highly anticipated, with tickets selling out the very same day they went on sale.

The same month, the OA Orchestra and Chorus brought their expertise and stamina to a special Young Artist Program workshop for Australia’s next generation of singers, répétiteurs, and directors. The 2025 OA Young Artists were put through their paces with a challenging program, working alongside the Orchestra and Chorus, conducted by Simon Bruckard at the Joan Sutherland Studio. A diverse and challenging program of 20th-century opera – from the atmospheric intensity of Benjamin Britten’s *Peter Grimes* and the ceremonial vibrancy of his *Gloriana* through to the diatonic neoclassicism of Igor Stravinsky’s *The Rake’s Progress* and high-energy eclecticism of Jonathan Dove’s *Flight* – provided the emerging artists with a unique insider’s experience.



Australian mezzo-soprano Sian Sharp performs in the Opera Australia Canberra Gala Concert, 2025. Photo: Photox

Hadestown – an epic story of love, hope, and sacrifice – made its stunning Australian premiere in February at the Theatre Royal Sydney. Brought to the stage by Opera Australia and JONES Theatrical Group, the boundary-pushing musical, which mixes New Orleans-style jazz and modern American folk music, offers an inspired reimagining of a story familiar to opera-goers: the mythic tale of Orpheus and Eurydice. Directed by Rachel Chavkin, singer-songwriter Anais Mitchell's multi-Tony Award-winning show took audiences on an action-packed, politically conscious ride to the depths of the underworld and back.

Multi-ARIA Award-winner Christine Anu shone in the role of Hermes. Rising stars Abigail Adriano (*Miss Saigon*, 2023) and Noah Mullins (*West Side Story*, 2019 and 2021) played Eurydice and Orpheus respectively. Opera Australia veteran Adrian Tamburini delivered a powerful performance as Hades, the uncompromising, bass-voiced leader of the underworld. The Fates, the Greek chorus of fear and fatalism, were magnificently embodied by Sarah Murr, Jennifer Trijo, and Imani Williams. Rounding out the fabulous headlining cast was Elenoa Rokobaro in the role of vivacious, bluesy Persephone for which she earned the gong of Best Performance in a Supporting Role in a Musical at the 2025 Sydney Theatre Awards.

Hadestown was performed by an energetic ensemble of actors, dancers, and singers. The “workers,” who represent the enslaved souls trapped in Hades' industrial underworld, express the musical's core themes of exploitation and ultimate rebellion and are onstage for the majority of the show. These essential workers of the stage require major stamina, as do the “swings” who are called on to cover multiple ensemble or lead roles.

Two of the *Hadestown* company – Eliza Soriano and Joshua Kobeck – made their professional musical theatre debuts, plucked from obscurity through open call auditions. In addition to both appearing as workers, Soriano was an understudy for the principal role of Eurydice and Kobeck an understudy for Hades and Hermes.

Taking to the stage was quite a departure from the routine of Joshua Kobeck's regular day job as an oncology scientist. “I was working in the hospital,” Kobeck recalls. “It was a demanding and full-on role and so at the start of 2024 I was like: ‘We just need to do something that's not work; go out and have a laugh a bit more.’ I auditioned with a big group of friends, but I had low hopes. Then I was successful. It went on from there – and it was a lot of fun!” Musical theatre may seem a long way from the world of clinical lung cancer trials, but Kobeck found some surprising overlaps: “So much of what made *Hadestown* special was how much the directors encouraged me to draw on my work-life experiences – both good and bad (I see some really sick patients) – to take on the characters in the show. It really helped me.” Looking forward, Kobeck hopes to combine medicine and music. “I don't think that you have to have one career. I'm looking for a world in which I can do both!”



Abigail Adriano as Eurydice, Christine Anu as Hermes, and Noah Mullins as Orpheus in *Hadestown*, 2025. Photo: Lisa Tomasetti

Eliza Soriano's pathway into *Hadestown* was more direct than Kobeck's, but it still entailed a steep learning curve. Auditioning for a role while she was in her third and final year of training at the Australian Institute of Music, *Hadestown* was Soriano's first professional show. "It was a completely new experience," she says. "It was very demanding – especially since the ensemble consisted of only five people, on stage most of the time." Called on to stand in for Abigail Adriano who was unexpectedly unable to perform, Soriano found herself in the role of Eurydice for the opening night performance in her hometown of Melbourne. "I will never be able to put into words how that moment felt," she gushes. "It was quite emotional. To be playing a role like Eurydice in my hometown, in front of my loved ones and to a sold-out theatre was overwhelming in the best way." From here, Soriano hopes to keep building her career in music. Appearing in *Hadestown* was a dream come true. "I didn't think my break into the industry would happen so soon and with a show as big as *Hadestown*," she marvels. "So who knows what else is going to happen for me. I'm so grateful to Opera Australia for helping me to start the career that little Eliza always dreamed of."

Hadestown was an unforgettable musical experience, with an on-the-pulse message that was defiantly optimistic. The production was nothing short of a triumph and a real people-pleasing treat, especially among young people – 45% of audiences to the show were aged under 35. The sell-out season broke Theatre Royal Sydney box office records. It was a similar story in Melbourne, with tickets at Her Majesty's Theatre selling out and Noah Mullins winning the Time Out Melbourne Awards' People's Choice for Favourite Performance in a Musical.

"A beautifully put-together production of Greek mythology, and a perfect reminder of why live theatre and live music is so special. Everything about Hadestown was top notch - the storyline, stage design, ensemble cast, musicians, music and lyrics ... This is what the magic of live musical theatre is all about."

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *HADESTOWN*

Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour (HOSH) is a recognised must-see on the Sydney calendar. For 2025, Opera Australia's brand-new production of the award-winning Broadway musical *Guys & Dolls* opened at the iconic venue in March. The larger-than-life world of showgirls and gangsters in flashy 1950s Manhattan was set against the backdrop of Sydney's glittering harbour. This was the first major production of *Guys & Dolls* in Australia in a decade, and the staging also opened a new chapter in the iconic Sydney Harbour venue's history as the first musical comedy to be performed at the harbourside event. In another first for HOSH, the orchestra was elevated from its customary subterranean spot below stage to a purpose-built, fully-enclosed sky deck nestled behind a street sign.

A dynamic cast of young talent commanded the signature over-water HOSH stage: international recording artist Cody Simpson brought verve to the stage as high-roller Sky Masterson, fresh from her success in OA's *Candide* Annie Aitken took on the role of Sarah Brown, acclaimed song-and-dance man Bobby Fox appeared as the resourceful Nathan Detroit, and indefatigable star of *Hamilton* Jason Arrow charmed as Nicely-Nicely Johnson. Angelina Thomson impressed in the role of showgirl Miss Adelaide, delighting critics and audiences alike. Thomson herself described returning to the stage in a leading role at the iconic Sydney Harbour venue where she'd previously appeared in *West Side Story* as "a pinch-me moment!"

In-demand, award-winning director Shaun Rennie brought zest and innovation to this brand new, supersized production of the classic musical. The centrepiece of set designer Brian Thomson's vision was an oversized yellow New York taxicab, which transformed over the course of the evening from a bar into a newsstand, a nightclub, and more. Costume designer Jennifer Irwin splashed the stage with colourful, patterned suits and eye-grabbing showgirl outfits. Kelley Abbey's choreography was a highlight, earning her the award for Best Choreography of a Musical at the 2025 Sydney Theatre Awards.



Jason Arrow as Nicely-Nicely Johnson, Joel Granger as Benny Southstreet, and John Xintavelonis as Harry the Horse in Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour's 2025 production of *Guys & Dolls*.
Photo: Neil Bennett

“With a high degree of difficulty, the inaugural cohort of OA’s revitalised Young Artist Program more than prove they are ready for their mainstage debuts.”

LIMELIGHT MAGAZINE REVIEW,
‘RUSSIAN SONG RECITAL’



The visionary philanthropic support of Principal Patron Maureen Wheeler AO, alongside Opera Australia’s ongoing commitment, is shaping the next generation of operatic talent through the Opera Australia Young Artist Program.

Australia’s physical distance, relatively small graduate pathways, and limited access to specialist language training once meant aspiring opera professionals needed to further their professional training overseas. The OA Young Artist Program addresses these challenges by delivering artistic training integrated with broader professional and personal development. The program is a leading best-practice model for nurturing emerging talent designed by Head of Young Artists Dr Francis Greep and Young Artist Producer Jane Hennessy. The rigorous schedule

of daily coaching, rehearsals, and scene work is overseen by Greep and supported by a distinguished group of practitioners.

In 2025, three distinguished Guest Artists from overseas – Marie-France Lefebvre (USA), Tanja Binggeli (Germany), and Stefano Vizioli (Italy) – collaborated with the cohort on recitals and opera scenes. Local specialists worked regularly with them throughout the year in areas including Acting (Dr Ben Schostakowski, NIDA), Russian Language (Dr Natalia Melnik), Movement (Dani Evrat), Yoga (Sarah Sweeting), Nutrition (Caitlin Edmonds), and Mental Health and Wellbeing (Dr Jane Miskovic). Further musical and career expertise and guidance was provided by Young Artist Associates Yvonne Kenny, Cheryl Barker AO, Peter Coleman-Wright AO, Nicole Car, and Étienne Dupuis.

In its first 12 months, the Young Artist Program delivered an extensive and varied performance schedule that reflected the versatility and growth of its participants. The year began with a Liederabend, 'Träume und Trennung,' at the Goethe-Institut in April, followed by 12 recital and scene performances across German, French, Italian, English, and Russian repertoire. In July, a program of 'Great Opera Hits' was given for an invited audience in Melbourne and a sold-out performance at the Sydney Opera House.

A particular highlight in September was a week-long workshop of scenes from operas by Stravinsky, Britten, and Dove with the Opera Australia Orchestra, conducted by Simon Bruckhard, and joined by members of the Opera Australia Chorus. Rounding out the year, the four singers were featured as part of 'The Young Stars of Australian Opera' in the 2025 Salvation Army Carols in the Domain in Sydney.

After 12 months of intensive skill and repertoire building, evidence of success of the program can be found in Opera Australia's mainstage casting. In the Sydney Summer 2026 season, each young artist singer debuted roles and was assigned understudies in *Madama Butterfly*, *Hansel and Gretel*, and *Eugene Onegin*. Répétiteur Jem Herbert joined the music staff for *Madama Butterfly*, while Director Claudia Osborne took on the key creative roles of Revival Director (*Hansel and Gretel*) and Assistant Director (*Eugene Onegin*). Osborne will also be Revival Director for the Melbourne season of *La Traviata*.

The 2025 cohort of young artists have demonstrated adaptability, professionalism, and generosity of spirit, enriching the program and broader company culture.

Chelsea Burns - Soprano

"Working with international specialists inspires me to lift my artistry."

Shikara Ringdahl - Mezzo-soprano

"I realised I had never sung at full capacity until this program."

Elias Wilson - Tenor

"The non-musical elements have taught me as much about life as about performance."

Leon Vitogiannis - Baritone

"The program deepens understanding of repertoire and shows that artistry requires knowledge."

Jem Herbert - Répétiteur

"Guidance from generous mentors has shaped my growth immensely."

Claudia Osborne - Director

"The national company environment has given me confidence to take risks and seek collaboration."



(L-R): Young Artists Elias Wilson and Shikara Ringdahl with Young Artist Associates Nicole Car and Peter Coleman-Wright AO.
Photo: Neil Bennett



“Over the past few months, the Summer Season has been a transformative experience for me - both professionally and personally. My understanding of opera as a genre has deepened, particularly through my work on Cinderella and The Barber of Seville. This exposure has enhanced my knowledge of opera’s intricate storytelling and its symbiotic relationship with the music, particularly in terms of dynamics between orchestra and singers.”

BEVERLY KWAN, PATRICIA H. REID
ORCHESTRAL FELLOW (VIOLIN), 2025

“Opera Australia founded me - I think incredibly fondly on those times. I was thrown in the deep end in my first season, all of a sudden I was singing Mimi in a new production of La Bohème. I met so many wonderful people along the way, so many great friends and fantastic colleagues, and it really helped teach my craft and it gave me a real boost and springboard into what has become a big international career. I am forever grateful and very happy to have had those experiences.”

NICOLE CAR, AUSTRALIAN-BORN,
INTERNATIONALLY CELEBRATED SOPRANO

The Patricia H. Reid Endowment

Choosing a life in the arts takes courage. It asks young musicians to prioritise an uncertain dream over a more predictable path. Each year the Patricia H. Reid Endowment makes this decision a little less daunting. And in 2025, it did this for five emerging Australian string musicians.

Now in its fourth year, the Patricia H. Reid Orchestral Fellowship placed five Fellows at the heart of Opera Australia's Sydney seasons: Catherine Jang and Beverly Kwan on violin, Sarah Zhu on viola, Alexandra Elvin on double bass, and Joseph Kelly on cello. Together, they performed in productions ranging across some of the world's most beloved repertoire, from Opera Australia's *La Bohème* and *Carmen* to The Australian Ballet's *The Sleeping Beauty*. All up, they accumulated more than 700 calls across the year. These were formative hours spent developing the precision, ensemble instinct, and professional resilience that define a lasting career.

The Fellowship goes far beyond the pit. Each artist was paired with an OA Orchestra section leader as a dedicated mentor, seated alongside seasoned professionals, and coached through private lessons tailored to individual productions. They attended workshops with a performance psychologist, a masterclass with conductor Lidiya Yankovskaya, and a chamber reading of *Carmen* with OA's Head of Music, Tahu Matheson. In Melbourne, they stepped into the spotlight as the headline performers at a dedicated chamber concert for donors and guests – a moment of pride and professional commitment in equal measure.

The Fellows' stories speak for themselves. Beverly Kwan described the 2025 season as “transformative – both professionally and personally.” Alexandra Elvin, who performed an extraordinary 197 calls across ten productions, has since continued with the Orchestra into 2026, as have Catherine Jang and Sarah Zhu.

For 2026, five new Fellows have already been selected, ready to begin their music journeys. The pipeline continues, and with it, the future of Australian orchestral excellence.

The George and Nerissa Johnson Memorial Scholarship

The George and Nerissa Johnson Memorial Scholarship supports an overseas professional development study period for up to eight weeks for performing artists. Study can include advanced vocal tuition, repertoire development, stylistic refinement, and professional observation through private lessons, coaching, and attendance at opera performances.

For 2025, the recipients included:

Maia Andrews	Ben Rasheed
Anna-Louise Cole	Shanul Sharma
Tomas Dalton	Ruth Strutt
Mariana Hong	Ashlyn Tymms
Nicholas Jones	Danita Weatherstone
Emma Pearson	

The Aotearoa New Zealand Opera Studio (TANZOS)

In July 2025, we were delighted to welcome back The Aotearoa New Zealand Opera Studio (TANZOS), continuing a valued and growing collaboration. Five voice students joined us for an immersive two-week residency delivered at The Opera Centre and The Sydney Opera House.

This residency provided a comprehensive insight into the professional operatic environment, offering participants the opportunity to engage with leading practitioners and gain a deeper understanding of the many departments that underpin the work of Opera Australia.

Led by program director Madeleine Pierard (Chair of Opera at the University of Waikato and former Young Artist with The Royal Opera, Covent Garden), the students participated in a curated program developed by the OA Young Artist team. This included workshops in wigs, hair and make-up, movement sessions, and a range of coaching and professional development sessions with esteemed artists and staff, including Language Coach Nicole Dorigo, Head of Music and Chorus Master Michael Black (Chicago Lyric Opera), NIDA Acting Head of Directing Dr Ben Schostakowski, and Young Artist Associates Cheryl Barker AO and Peter Coleman-Wright AO.

Participants were also given access to Opera Australia's rehearsal process, attending the *Carmen* general rehearsal, *Rusalka* sitzprobe, and a production rehearsal of *The Marriage of Figaro*. A highlight for many was the opportunity to experience *Carmen* from both the orchestra pit and stage perch, providing a unique perspective on the performance behind the scenes.

An integral part of this residency was a mock audition held at the Sydney Opera House on the Joan Sutherland stage. The students delivered their best performances to the esteemed panel comprising conductor Johannes Fritzsich, soprano Kiandra Howarth, and bass-baritone Michael Sumuel. Fritzsich, Howarth, and Sumuel generously made time at the conclusion of the audition to offer detailed feedback – a rare gift for a young performer.

“Coming from a smaller country like New Zealand, it was incredible to be part of the Opera Australia residency and to visit the iconic Sydney Opera House. Being in that environment opened up the opera world for me in a whole new way and has made me even more excited about what the future holds.”

TANZOS PARTICIPANT, 2025

AUDIENCE



Audience at Great Opera Hits, Sydney Opera House, 2025. Photo: Daniel Boud



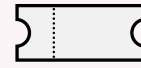
574,809

TOTAL
ATTENDEES



68.5%

FIRST-TIME
OPERA AUSTRALIA
PURCHASERS
(OPERA)



75.6%

FIRST-TIME
OPERA AUSTRALIA
PURCHASERS
(MUSICAL THEATRE)

DIGITAL AUDIENCE



FOLLOWERS:
15,387
GROWTH:
7.9%



FOLLOWERS:
17,365
GROWTH:
8.7%



FOLLOWERS:
57,421
GROWTH:
19.2%



FOLLOWERS:
92,416
GROWTH:
3%



TOTAL
FOLLOWERS:
206,089

AUDIENCES: TOP TEN OUTSIDE AUSTRALIA



1

USA



2

UNITED
KINGDOM



3

SOUTH
KOREA



4

CHINA



5

GERMANY



6

NEW
ZEALAND



7

JAPAN



8

CANADA



9

TAIWAN



10

HONG KONG

In 2025, a total of 574,809 people attended our performances, with more than 68% of purchasers of opera tickets and over 75% of purchases of musical theatre tickets obtained by first-time customers. Half of all buyers were under the age of 50 and, according to post-show surveys, 93.3% of first-time attendees indicated they would attend opera again.

These results stem from the comprehensive segmentation research completed in 2023 and Opera Australia's refinement of its approach to creating accessible pathways into opera, while deepening engagement with existing audiences. Opera Australia's results demonstrate that strategic programming, combined with targeted access initiatives, can drive meaningful audience expansion.

Our programming continues to be guided by a deep understanding of the eight distinct audience segments identified through our behavioural and ethnographic research – from passionate opera devotees with high attendance frequency to culturally curious non-attenders who hold positive perceptions of opera but face barriers to participation. This segmentation, the database entries for which almost doubled in 2025, informs every aspect of our audience strategy, from programming decisions to pricing structures to partnership development. By tailoring our approach to the specific motivations, preferences, and barriers of each group, we create multiple entry points into the artform while building pathways toward deeper, sustained engagement.

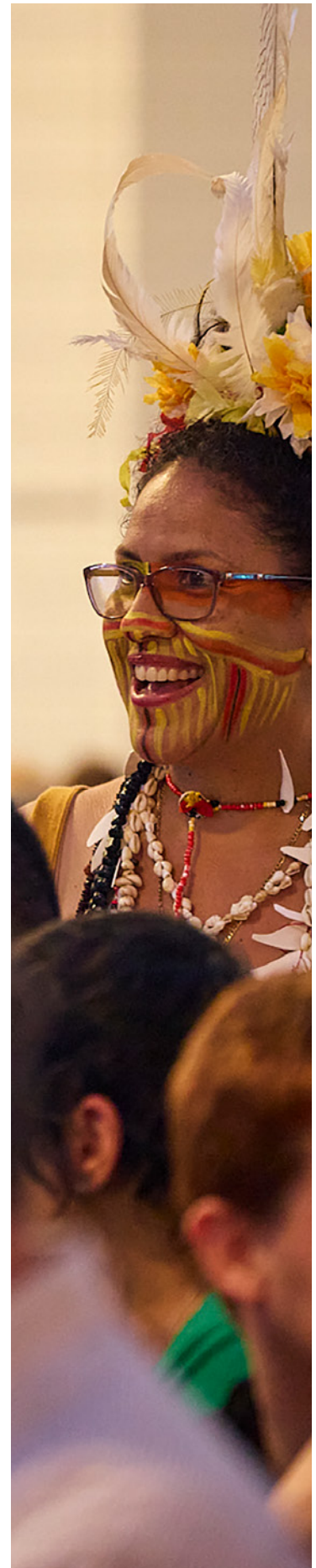
Lowering the barrier to entry

While cost and access remain the most significant barriers to attendance – particularly for younger and newer audiences, our segmentation confirms our access strategy is reaching the intended audiences. Our commitment to younger audiences produced remarkable results. The Under 35s Program – launched in 2024 with the question “have you ever wanted to give opera a try?” – has grown significantly in its second year. Membership increased by 55%, while actual purchasing behaviour showed even stronger growth: purchasers more than doubled (+110%) and paid tickets increased by 133%.

This conversion from membership to attendance demonstrates that when barriers of cost and access are removed, younger audiences will engage enthusiastically with opera.

The success extends across our full suite of youth initiatives. Student Rush grew by 73% in purchasers and 62% in paid tickets, while Opera for Students saw 132% growth in tickets sold. For the first time, we offered a two-production package to Under 35s members in our Sydney Winter and Melbourne Spring seasons which saw significant uptake, indicating the audience's interest in experiencing a breadth of repertoire.

In 2025, the Wakil Access Program provided over 1,500 people who are new to opera with the opportunity to experience it for the first time. The program remains an important commitment to reducing cost barriers for newcomers to the artform.



Aiba Godwin in the audience at Opera Australia and the Australian Museum's Yumi Bung Wantaim: Songs of Gathering, 2025. Photo: VANFLIX

Musicals as a pathway into opera

Opera Australia’s commercial musical theatre programming is a significant engine of audience development for opera. Post-show survey data shows musical theatre is the number one crossover artform for first-time opera attendees – ranked above any other performing art. The scale of new audience engagement through musicals is equally substantial: across *Guys & Dolls*, *RENT*, *Hadestown*, and *Anastasia* in 2025, 77% of ticket buyers were first-time Opera Australia purchasers. Programming musicals alongside opera is not a parallel activity but a connected one; it brings new audiences into Opera Australia’s ecosystem who already have an affinity for sung, staged storytelling, creating a natural bridge toward opera attendance.

Turning first-timers into returning audiences

Getting audiences through the door is only half the story. Opera Australia’s programming and production strategy is increasingly focused on what makes a first-time attendee return. In 2025, according to post-show surveys, 93.3% of first-time attendees indicated they would attend opera again.

Our experience aligns with Opera America’s 2025 findings that new audiences are motivated by the promise of a new experience, rather than repertoire knowledge alone, and that repeat attendance depends less on what is programmed than on how works are produced. Repertoire from the canon, when approached with fresh perspectives and intentional production choices, serves both artistic integrity and audience growth simultaneously.

This evidence-led thinking directly connects to insights from Opera Australia’s conversion gateway segments. Our “Fun Seeking Revellers” and “Bucket-List Discoverers” use recognisable works as their entry point but convert to repeat attenders based on how those works are staged, contextualised, and made emotionally accessible.

Reflecting contemporary Australia

According to survey data collected across all productions in 2025, 28.9% of our audience identify as culturally and linguistically diverse, while 0.70% identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. These figures provide a baseline as we work to ensure opera reflects and welcomes the full diversity of contemporary Australia.

“Opera Australia audiences are evolving, with engagement broadening across segments. Leveraging our segmentation modelling and increasingly sophisticated personalisation, we can better match programming, partnerships, and marketing to audience behaviours and needs. With this more targeted approach, Opera Australia is well positioned to deepen engagement, grow reach, and inspire both existing and new audiences.”

SIMON MEILAK,
MARKETING AND
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR



Andrew Moran as Martin, Dominica Matthews as The Old Lady, Eddie Muliaumaseali’i as Cacambo, Annie Aitken as Cunegonde, Lyndon Watts as Candide, Euan Fistrovic Doidge as Maximillian, Cathy-Di Zhang as Paquette, and Eddie Perfect as Pangloss in *Candide*, 2025. Photo: Carlita Sari



“This is really special because I haven’t heard these pieces given that kind of life that an orchestra can give - because an orchestra makes things otherworldly. It’s really beautiful.”

HERU PINKASOVA,
PAPUA NEW GUINEAN-AUSTRALIAN
SOPRANO, YUMI BUNG WANTAIM:
SONGS OF GATHERING

Yumi Bung Wantaim: Songs of Gathering marked an historic first-of-its-kind partnership between Opera Australia and the Australian Museum, uniting two of Australia’s most respected cultural institutions in a shared commitment to storytelling, community, and cultural celebration.

Held in the Australian Museum’s Hintze Hall, the fully subscribed event welcomed over 300 attendees for an evening of music that wove together Pasifika rhythms and Western operatic traditions into something entirely new. The concert opened exciting possibilities for artists and audiences alike – a demonstration of music’s power to connect communities across cultures.

Exploring themes of identity, ancestry, and cultural resilience through song, the performance brought together celebrated Pasifika opera artists, community voices, and the Opera Australia Orchestra in a tribute to shared heritage. Samoan bass-baritone Eddie Muliaumaseali’i and Papua New Guinean-Australian soprano Heru Pinkasova performed traditional Pasifika songs and operatic arias, with Niulala Helu leading the Tautahi Choir conducted by Chad Kelly.

Opera Australia Head of Education, Learning and Participation, Nathan Gilkes, pointed out that traditional song and opera share similar elements: “There are stories of warriors, of kings, of love, of loss. When people sing together, we activate something deep in us all.”

For Heru Pinkasova, whether it’s opera or traditional music, she says she’s always a proud Pasifika artist. “It doesn’t matter what I sing, I’m still me; I’m still a Pasifika woman singing, regardless of what I do.”

By placing Mozart and Pasifika music side by side, Yumi Bung Wantaim demonstrated that opera is not a fixed or exclusive tradition, but a living artform capable of embracing diverse cultural voices.

“It’s as much about Opera Australia learning as a major cultural institution, as it is about bringing the gift of song,” Gilkes said.

Yumi Bung Wantaim: Songs of Gathering carried special resonance in 2025, marking the 150th anniversary of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Tonga – the oldest written constitution in the Pacific, lending depth to the evening’s celebration of Pasifika identity.

EXPLORING NEW PARTNERSHIPS



Niulala Helu and Sisi'uni Helu (foreground) perform at Opera Australia and the Australian Museum's Yumi Bung Wantaim: Songs of Gathering, 2025. Photo: VANFLIX



On the evening of 1 February 2025, thousands of Victorians gathered at Fed Square for the third consecutive Melbourne presentation of BMW Opera for All – an open-air concert presented by Opera Australia in partnership with BMW.

Part of BMW’s international Opera for All initiative, the event brings high-quality opera into major public spaces, ensuring the experience is accessible to diverse audiences. In Melbourne, the concert once again transformed Fed Square into a shared cultural space where audiences could experience live opera free of charge.

With no tickets or registration required, the audience blended long-standing opera enthusiasts alongside visitors, families, and even incidental passers-by who stopped to listen, and ended up staying for the whole performance. By removing cost and access barriers, the concert offered a rare opportunity for the Victorian community to experience live opera in an open, familiar, and welcoming environment.

Of those attendees interviewed at the conclusion of the concert, just over 90% said they came to the concert for the first time, with 15% travelling from regional Victoria and 80% from across Melbourne. 43% said they were likely to attend paid opera in the future.

Hosted by Greta Bradman AM, the evening opened with a beautiful 30-minute prelude performance by the Australian Girls Choir. Their appearance connected young aspiring performers with some of the country’s leading operatic artists, highlighting the importance of nurturing the next generation of Australian musicians.

The concert featured four of Australia’s finest principal artists – soprano Olivia Cranwell, mezzo-soprano Dimity Shepherd, tenor Shanul Sharma, and baritone Christopher Hillier.

The singers were accompanied by musicians from Orchestra Victoria under the baton of conductor Brian Castles-Onion AM.

BMW Opera for All, 2025 (L-R): Wolfgang Buechel, then-CEO, BMW Group Australia; Greta Bradman AM, Opera Australia Board Director and MC; Christopher Hillier, baritone; Olivia Cranwell, soprano; Brian Castles-Onion AM, conductor; Dr Thomas Girst, Head of Cultural Engagement, BMW Group; Rebecca Kitelinger, Opera Australia Development Director; Shanul Sharma, tenor; Dimity Shepherd, mezzo-soprano. Photo: Andrew Hobbs

Together singers and musicians performed a program of opera's most beloved pieces including Puccini's 'Si, mi chiamano Mimi,' Verdi's crowd favourite 'Libiamo,' and classical works with immediate appeal for both newcomers and seasoned opera audiences.

Wolfgang Buechel, CEO of BMW Group Australia, reaffirmed the company's commitment to making opera accessible to broad audiences, noting that, "BMW Opera for All is a global initiative that celebrates culture, creativity, and the joy that music brings to people of all ages. We are proud to partner with Opera Australia, ensuring that world-class opera is accessible to everyone in the heart of Melbourne."

By presenting world-class performance in a free public setting, BMW Opera for All continues to demonstrate how the performing arts can bring communities together, activate civic spaces, and introduce curious newcomers to opera.



Audience at BMW Opera for All, Fed Square, Melbourne, 2025. Photo: Andrew Hobbs



Opera Australia's 29th annual National Tour in 2025 brought Dean Bryant's celebrated production of *La Bohème* to 15 locations across six states and territories from July to September. Beginning in Geelong, the tour journeyed through regional Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Queensland, and Western Australia before reaching audiences as far north as Cairns and Tennant Creek, and as far west as Kalgoorlie.

The production, developed for the 2024 National Tour and now in its second year on the road, was set in 1970s Paris, with set and costume design by Isabel Hudson and lighting by Damien Cooper. The 2025 tour saw 19 performances, including ones in Murwillumbah, Rockhampton, Mackay, Caloundra, Mandurah, and Alice Springs' Araluen Arts Centre. The company also performed at Barkly Regional Arts in Tennant Creek – one of the most remote venues on the tour – bringing a fully-staged opera production to a community more than 500 kilometres from the nearest capital city.

Director Dean Bryant, who grew up in regional Australia, has spoken of the resonance the *La Bohème* production holds in this context. "This is a story about a group of young artists dealing with all the huge things in life for the first time. Growing up in regional Australia, I had the same passion and urgency to be heard, to fall in love, to live, so it's particularly exciting for me to be taking this production across the country," Bryant said.

Led by conductor Simon Bruckard, the cast included sopranos Danita Weatherstone and Maia Andrews sharing the role of Mimi, tenors John Longmuir and Nick Kirkup as Rodolfo, sopranos Cathy-Di Zhang and Sarah Prestwidge as Musetta, and baritones Andrew Williams and Benjamin Del Borrello as Marcello.

As ever, the Regional Children's Chorus program remained at the heart of the tour. At 11 locations, local students stepped onto the stage alongside the professional cast, performing before their families and communities as part of the production. The program creates a direct connection between Australia's national opera company and local communities, offering young participants a rare opportunity to take part in a major touring production while sharing the stage with professional singers and musicians. After rehearsing with Opera Australia's Children's Chorus Master, Simone Easthope, in the days leading up to the performance, the young singers joined the artists in Puccini's bustling Paris scenes. For many, this was their first experience performing in a professional opera.

Beyond its cultural contribution, the National Tour also delivers tangible economic benefits to regional communities. Touring productions bring performers, technical crews, and creative teams into regional centres, supporting local economies. Performances also draw audiences from surrounding towns and regions, contributing to visitor spending and reinforcing the role of regional arts centres as important cultural and economic hubs.

As Australia's national opera company, Opera Australia's touring program plays a vital role in ensuring that audiences across the country – regardless of geography – have the opportunity to experience world-class opera in their own communities.

Supported by the Opera Conference – Australia's national partnership of professional opera companies – and by the Australian, New South Wales, and Victorian governments through Creative Australia, Create NSW, and Creative Victoria respectively, Opera Australia's National Tour remains one of the company's most significant access investments.

“We have 15 very excited young people taking part in La Bohème. We have been learning the singing, learning the Italian pronunciation, and trying to get up to the fast tempo that has been set. It is also such an experience for them to stand onstage amongst full operatic voices.”

JOANNE WRIGHT,
FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR
OF CAIRNS YOUNG VOICES
(QUOTED IN CAIRNS LOCAL NEWS)





Learning and Engagement on tour

Woven into the fabric of the National Tour is a program of education, learning, and participation designed to open up the world of opera, music, and song for young people, families, and local communities.

Devised by Nathan Gilkes, Head of Education, Learning and Participation, the program brings masterclasses, workshops, and creative exchanges to communities along the touring route – embedding Opera Australia’s presence well beyond the performances of any given year.

In Canberra, singers Cathy-Di Zhang and John Longmuir, with répétiteur Martin Lijuaco, led a conservatory-style masterclass for six undergraduate music students from the Australian National University, offering individual coaching and feedback for an audience of peers and mentors. For singers at an early stage of their training, the opportunity to receive professional guidance from an Opera Australia artist is a distinctive and formative experience.

The Northern Territory program reflected Opera Australia’s commitment to creative collaboration with local communities. In Katherine, the company

partnered with Katherine Regional Arts to devise ‘Opera on the Oval,’ an open-air concert designed for a community setting outside a conventional theatre. The program featured arias from *La Bohème* alongside beloved opera highlights and a new arrangement of ‘You Really Can’t Change Your Name,’ an original song by local singer-songwriter CW Williams. Including this locally-authored work, arranged for the touring Orchestra, made the evening a unique and authentic experience.

In Darwin, conductor Simon Bruckard led a session with 40 Darwin High School students focused on vocal exercises and rehearsal techniques, working through Coldplay’s ‘Fix You’. This practical workshop provided students with direct experience of professional music-making to continue to build on, long after the company’s departure.

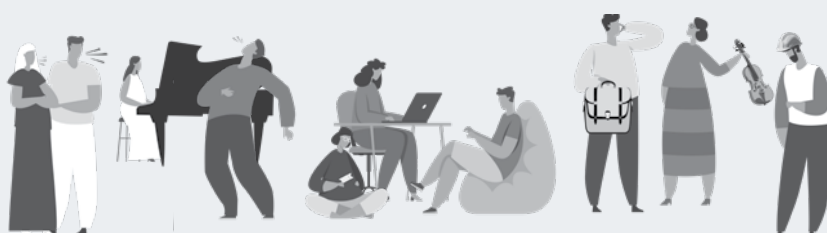
Together, these activities extended the National Tour’s impact beyond its performances, leaving communities not only with lasting memories of this funky new production of Puccini’s *La Bohème* but also with new skills, creative connections, and experiences deeply rooted in place.

COMPANY



Iestyn Davies as Orpheus and Circa Ensemble in Opera Australia's production of *Orpheus & Eurydice*, 2025.
Photo: Jeff Busby

EMPLOYEES



TOTAL EMPLOYEES

1,371



ARTISTS AND MUSICIANS

53.9%



TECHNICAL

30.27%



ADMINISTRATIVE AND MANAGEMENT

10.87%



PRODUCING AND ARTISTIC MANAGEMENT

4.96%



AUSTRALIANS IN KEY ROLES (CAST AND CONDUCTORS)

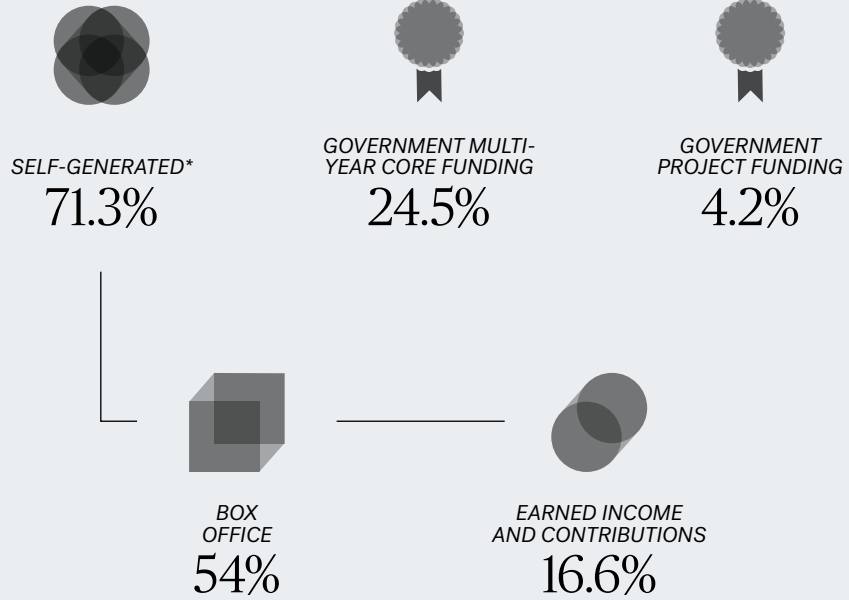
89.68%



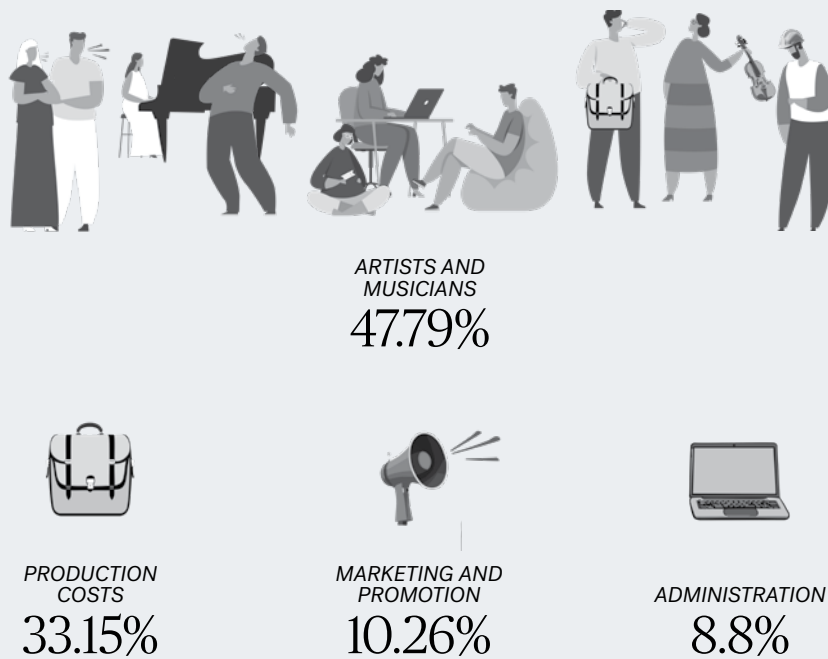
YOUNG ARTISTS SUPPORTED

27

REVENUE



EXPENDITURE



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.

Opera Australia's 2024–28 Strategy sets out a vision to sustain and grow opera as a relevant, accessible, and financially viable artform in Australia. It is framed around balancing three core priorities: our artform, audiences, and the company.

A central focus is artistic excellence and innovation.

Opera Australia aims to present productions at the highest international standard while expanding its repertoire through new works, co-productions, and collaborations with leading international and local partners. It also prioritises nurturing Australian talent through training programs and career pathways, ensuring a pipeline of future performers and creatives.

Recognising changing consumer behaviours and a declining traditional audience base, the strategy emphasises attracting new and more diverse audiences while retaining longstanding opera audiences. This includes making opera more accessible, enhancing the audience experience, and using targeted marketing and digital channels. Learning and community programs play an important role in building long-term engagement, particularly with young people and first-time attendees.

With a focus on financial sustainability and resilience,

Opera Australia is seeking to diversify revenue streams beyond ticket sales through philanthropy, partnerships, and commercial initiatives. Strengthening fundraising efforts and maintaining cost discipline are critical to ensuring long-term viability in a challenging economic environment. In 2025 Opera Australia made a submission to the NSW Government's Art of Tax Reform Summit; we welcomed the opportunity to make a submission to the Federal Government's 2026–27 Budget process, and we made a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Philanthropy in the Arts.

A further priority is inclusion and cultural leadership, particularly through commitment to First Nations engagement. Opera Australia aims to amplify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, embed cultural learning, and create opportunities for Indigenous artists and communities.

Organisational capability includes workforce development, collaboration across the arts sector, and governance. By investing in people, partnerships, and operational systems, Opera Australia aims to build a more agile and future-ready organisation. In 2025 we continued our interest-based bargaining for the 2025–27 enterprise agreements (EAs) – now concluded – which further established meaningful, detailed, and productive bargaining, focusing on aligning EA terms and conditions to Opera Australia's evolving operational requirements and strategic objectives.

We are also sensitive to and supportive of the Australian performing arts ecosystem. We offer comprehensive support services to Australian performing arts companies across all scales. These include knowledge exchange, professional development, technical consultation, and production resource lending.



Opera Australia's commitment to First Nations peoples is central to who we are as the national opera company. In 2025, we continued to build meaningful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with the aim to deepen cultural understanding, expand partnerships, and take steps toward shared decision-making and self-determination.

Progressing our Reconciliation Action Plan

Our *Reflect* Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) continued to guide our work in 2025, with measurable outcomes across governance, training, employment, procurement, and community engagement. Policies and procedures continue to be put in place to ensure culturally appropriate engagement is consistent and repeatable across Opera Australia, including creative production.

We have also advanced our approach to Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), consulting with our First Nations colleagues to identify ICIP in creative projects and ensure appropriate cultural protocols are observed. This is an important step in empowering First Nations creatives and ensuring cultural safety.

Building cultural competency across the company

At Opera Australia, cultural competency is an ongoing practice. In 2025, progress was made embedding cultural understanding within the company. We held Aboriginal cultural awareness workshops for staff and the Executive team in partnership with Mirri Mirri cultural awareness training, and ongoing training is planned for 2026. We integrated cultural competency objectives into our Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DIB) Plan, ensuring alignment with organisational strategy, and we commenced development of a dedicated Cultural Competence Policy – a single, overarching framework covering scope, obligations, governance, measurement, and review.

First Nations partnerships making a difference

Some of our most meaningful work in 2025 happened through partnerships that forged connections and opened doors for First Nations communities and artists. Throughout 2025 we continued to support production of *The Drover's Wife - The Opera*, directed by acclaimed First Nations artist Leah Purcell AM. This work exemplifies our approach to ensure community consultation with Elders throughout the creative process, provide trauma-informed training for production teams, and to instill a deep respect for the stories being told.

In May we partnered with the National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy (NASCA), connecting young people to music, storytelling, and creative career pathways. As part of the NASCA CareerFit program, in a culturally safe space for Aboriginal youth, our Education, Learning, and Participation team and staff from across the company hosted 'Opera in a Day' workshops for 24 students and 12 teachers from regional NSW and greater Sydney at our Opera Centre in Surry Hills.

The students gained exposure to creative and technical careers across performance, backstage, design, production, and marketing. The program, designed to spark interest and build awareness of diverse career pathways in opera, helped students envision a future in the arts. Participants emerged with a practical understanding of Opera Australia's work, and motivation to pursue creative opportunities, supporting the development of Australia's next generation of creative professionals.

As part of the NASCA CareerFit program Opera Australia also delivered professional development workshops to schools across New South Wales – from regional centres such as Brewarrina, Coonamble, Dubbo, Muswellbrook, Singleton, and Toormina – to schools in inner and southern Sydney. Opera Australia further extended its outreach by participating in the NASCA Careers Day, staffing an education trade table to provide tailored guidance and resources to students and educators.

We also initiated a new collaboration with Darkinjung Barker, hosting two pilot music workshops for K-2 and 3-6 First Nations students in their classrooms at the Yarralong campus. Together, we participated in storytelling through song, with Opera Australia's Nathan Gilkes, Jane Hennessy, and principal soprano Jane Ede inviting students and teachers to experience some foundation elements of opera in two sessions enjoyed by everyone.

Northern Territory connections

As an extension of the *La Bohème* National Tour, a new partnership was formed with Incite Arts, a disability-led, First Nations organisation in Alice Springs. Under the auspices of its Xpress Mparntwe Music Mentorship program, we facilitated a workshop with local artists. First Nations artists Jamie Fejo – a triple j Unearthed artist – and Graham Wilfred Jr workshopped a collaborative and original song alongside the touring Orchestra and singers.

In Tennant Creek, Opera Australia maintained its partnership with Barkly Regional Arts. A songwriters' exchange took place at their Winanjikari Music Centre, with two First Nations musicians, Delton Martin and Joseph Shannon. These exchanges placed local creative voices at the heart of the collaboration, reflecting Opera Australia's belief that the artform is enriched when it enters into genuine dialogue with the communities it visits.

Looking ahead

We are proud of the progress we've made, and aware of the significant work still ahead of us. In the coming year, we will focus on formalising governance structures to ensure First Nations decision-making authority, mandating cultural competency training across staff and Board, and deepening co-design with First Nations representatives across policies, programs, and partnerships. Having put a procurement strategy in place in 2025 to increase engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses, and having commenced our Supply Nation membership, in 2026 we will continue this commitment to supplier diversity.



Student at National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy Careers Day, 2025.
Photo: Wade van den Hoek, VANFLIX

LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT



LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT
PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

2,000



SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

52%



TEACHERS

6%



COMMUNITY

28.5%



PROFESSIONAL
PATHWAYS

12.8%



SCHOOL AND
COMMUNITY GROUPS

33



WORKSHOPS

40



NEW PARTNERSHIPS

20

In 2025, the pilot Education, Learning and Participation (ELP) program engaged over 2,000 participants across 30 school and community groups. It delivered 33 workshops and formed 20 new partnerships.

These activities focused on low SES schools, regional arts centres, and First Nations artists, contributing directly to Opera Australia's Reconciliation Action Plan. Highlights included 'Yumi Bung Wantaim: Songs of Gathering' (a landmark collaboration with the Australian Museum and Pasifika communities), the Geelong Creative Exchange for young singers and storytellers, and a Northern Territory initiative where First Nations musicians co-created new works with Opera Australia's touring Orchestra.

At the start of each of Opera Australia's 22 education workshops in 2025, students were asked a simple question: "What's the first thing you think of when you hear the word 'opera'?"

Their answers:

"Singing really high notes."
 "Breaking glass with your voice."
 "Old people."

They weren't entirely wrong – but they were only seeing part of the picture. Nathan Gilkes, OA's Head of Education, Learning and Participation, explains: "Opera, at its heart, is a story told through music. Unlike musical theatre, where dialogue often leads, in opera the music drives the story. It shapes emotion, pace, and meaning, letting us hear what is happening under the surface. This inherent poetry – holding language, sound, and feeling together – invites imagination first, and explanation later."

Gilkes, a Helpmann Award-winning composer and educator, is often asked by teachers why opera should be included in a crowded curriculum. His response is simple: "Opera is for everyone, and it's about everyone. It's a powerful way to learn, to feel, and to belong. Opera explores complex human experiences."

"[The character of] Cio-Cio-San in *Madama Butterfly* experiences heartbreak and abandonment, while Carmen navigates desire, jealousy, and the threat of male violence. These are emotions young people recognise instantly. Opera doesn't shy away from these feelings; it lingers with them, explores them, and gives them voice," Gilkes added.

"My son came to 'Opera in a Day' and was so excited when he came home. It gave him the confidence to audition for a musical, and he got a lead role. He is usually very shy."

PARENT OF A YEAR 5 STUDENT,
 NORTH STRATHFIELD

This makes opera a uniquely effective educational tool. Through it, students experience love, grief, fear, joy, and hope in a supported, shared environment. Developing the ability to recognise, express, and manage emotions strengthens emotional literacy, understanding, and resilience – all vital for young people's wellbeing and learning.

Students brought their own musical languages, stories, and identities into the creative process. For many, this reinforced a powerful message: their voices and experiences are part of Australia's cultural fabric. By the end of workshops, students who initially thought opera was "not for me" were saying:

"I didn't know this was opera."
 "I want to do that again!"

Why opera belongs in classrooms

Educators know that meaningful learning happens through both experience and instruction. They are expected to nurture creativity, collaboration, and wellbeing, even in a fast, screen-based world.

"Arts education can feel like an optional extra," Gilkes says. "Yet in our increasingly AI-driven world, the arts are among the most effective tools to enrich learning."

In 2025, the ELP program also reimagined work experience at The Opera Centre in Surry Hills for 32 Year 10 students and, welcomed 120 primary school students for 'Opera in a Day,' where they sang, created, and explored behind the scenes, culminating in a performance for teachers and staff.

In May, Opera Australia deepened its commitment to arts professional development by presenting 'The Operatic Classroom: Blending Music, Theatre, Song, and Story' – a workshop for NSW drama teachers. Delivered to 50 participants as part of the landmark conference Reclaim, Reignite, Reimagine: Celebrating 50 Years of Drama NSW, the workshop offered educators a hands-on exploration of how opera's unique synthesis of music, theatre, song, and storytelling can be meaningfully integrated into the Drama classroom. By engaging directly with practicing teachers at this significant milestone event, Opera Australia expanded educators' creative toolkit and inspired new pathways for students to encounter operatic art forms, underscoring the company's dedication to ensuring opera reaches the next generation through the classrooms of NSW.

In 2026, a focused program will expand reach across schools, audiences, communities, and regions, delivering lasting value for participants, partners, and communities while strengthening Opera Australia's public engagement role.

We gratefully acknowledge colleagues and communities with whom we established or re-established ELP partnerships in 2025:

Australian National University – School of Music
Australian Museum
Barkly Regional Arts, Tennant Creek
Bluebird Foundation
Charles Darwin University
Creative Geelong Makers Hub
Drama NSW
Geelong Arts Centre
Incite Arts – Xpress Music, Alice Springs
Katherine Regional Arts
Macquarie University – PACE Program
Midnight Feast
Mirri Mirri Cultural Awareness Training
NASCA – National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy
Pasifika Concert partners
Sydney Catholic Schools
Sydney Conservatorium of Music
Sydney Opera House / Sydney Opera House Centre for Creativity
University of Melbourne
Victorian College of the Arts



Kindergarten and Year 1 students from Daceyville Public School, NSW, enjoy a violin demonstration.
Photo: Noni Carroll

In February Noah Gullan, a Master of Theatre (Directing) student at Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) was one of two VCA students who undertook a three-week work experience placement with Opera Australia's *Guys & Dolls* performing company. Spending time at the Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour site shadowing director Shaun Rennie, Gullan said the scale and grandeur of HOSH was "an immediate eye-opener and a fascinating area of the industry to witness."

As Rennie prepared the performers for the show, Gullan was right beside him. "It was fascinating to observe the challenges of a production this size being solved through the freedom of exploration and collaboration between Shaun and the actors," Gullan says. And he believes his placement will inform his future arts practice: "This placement within the world of HOSH provided a glimpse into how artists and producers operate at the top of their game producing the largest theatrical event in the country. I hope one day to work for Opera Australia, even though the scale I will be working at in the short term is vastly smaller!"

In an extension of Opera Australia's education reach, undertaking professional development during *Guys & Dolls* rehearsals were 17 Sydney Conservatorium of Music Collaborative Piano students who observed OA music staff and Musical Director Guy Simpson at work. This behind-the-scenes access offered students an exceptional window into the professional rehearsal process at the highest level.

A further 50 senior Creative and Performing Arts students from Mount St Benedict College and Nepean Creative and Performing Arts High School also visited the rehearsal site, gaining firsthand insight into how a major performing company operates, and bringing the realities of a professional arts career to life for the next generation of emerging artists.

Further extending its community reach, Opera Australia invited diverse groups to attend the *Guys & Dolls* general rehearsal, with 300 teachers and students from across greater Sydney welcomed in for this unique opportunity. Attendees represented a broad cross-section of the arts education community, including the Australian Museum Pasifika Youth Council, NIDA singer-actor students, Sydney Conservatorium Musical Theatre students, and Midnight Feast all-abilities company.

Across the year, Opera Australia also offered six student secondments for *Hadestown*, *RENT*, and *Anastasia*. By opening its rehearsal process to such a wide and varied audience, Opera Australia demonstrated its commitment to making opera accessible and relevant across cultural, educational, and community boundaries.

"This placement within the world of HOSH provided a glimpse into how artists and producers operate at the top of their game, producing the largest theatrical event in the country. I hope one day to work for Opera Australia, even though the scale I will be working at in the short term is vastly smaller!"

NOAH GULLAN,
MASTER OF THEATRE
(DIRECTING) STUDENT,
VICTORIAN COLLEGE
OF THE ARTS

SHARING OUR RESOURCES



Music Director Andrea Battistoni (front) and the Opera Australia Orchestra, Sydney Opera House.
Photo: Keith Saunders

One of Opera Australia's most significant contributions to Australia's cultural landscape is the breadth of work performed by the Opera Australia Orchestra (OAO), not only in service of its own productions, but in support of partner organisations and the wider arts community.

The Opera Australia Orchestra and The Australian Ballet

In 2025, the OAO took its place in the pit of the Joan Sutherland Theatre at the Sydney Opera House for four landmark ballets.

The ballet season opened in April with *Nijinsky*, John Neumeier's moving tribute to the legendary dancer and choreographer. The production wove together an intricate tapestry of music by Chopin, Schumann, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Shostakovich, with conductor Jonathan Lo drawing from the OAO a performance of extraordinary emotional range.

In late April, *Manon* brought Sir Kenneth MacMillan's celebrated ballet back to Sydney for the first time in a decade. With the OAO, Jules Massenet's score filled the Joan Sutherland Theatre with the grandeur and heartbreak that this complex, morally charged work demands.

November brought a change of pace with *Prism*, a contemporary triple-bill pairing choreographers William Forsythe, Jerome Robbins, and The Australian Ballet's Stephanie Lake, with music by James Blake, Philip Glass, and J.S. Bach. For the OAO, the centrepiece work, Robbins' 'Glass Pieces,' was a two-week test of concentration and endurance, with Philip Glass's score demanding sustained precision from every musician in the pit.

The year closed with *The Sleeping Beauty*. Once again under Jonathan Lo's baton, the OAO brought Tchaikovsky's beloved score to life with warmth, lifting the dancers' artistry to its fullest expression.

Our Orchestra on other stages

The Orchestra's community reach extended to the Concourse Concert Hall in Chatswood to support the IFAC Handa Australian Singing Competition, one of Australia's most prestigious platforms for emerging opera and classical singing talent. Under the baton of Natalie Murray Beale, the Orchestra accompanied five young finalists, with Sidra Nissen named the winner of the Marianne Mathy Scholarship. Hosted by soprano Nina Korbe – herself set to star in the world premiere of *The Drover's Wife – The Opera* in 2026 – and broadcast on ABC Classic, the evening demonstrated Opera Australia's commitment to nurturing the next generation of Australian singers and enriching the broader cultural life of its communities.

Our rehearsal spaces shared in Sydney and Melbourne

In October 2025 Opera Australia supported the development of *TITO!*, a new Australian opera by Sarah Giles, Ash Flanders, and Luke Di Somma, through the provision of in-kind rehearsal and writing space at The Opera Centre, Melbourne. *TITO!* is a comedic, genre-blending work that reimagines iconic operatic repertoire within an original narrative, combining the structure of a backstage farce with a jukebox musical. During this period, co-writers Sarah Giles and Ash Flanders undertook an intensive writing workshop, advancing the development of the work and contributing to the completion of its first act. The support of Opera Australia formed a key part of the project's early development, enabling focused creative collaboration on a new and ambitious addition to the Australian operatic landscape.

*“Tchaikovsky's music,
so artfully shaped
by conductor
Jonathan Lo and
the Opera Australia
Orchestra, did its
part in lifting the
moment. My eyes
welled – a good sign.”*

DANCE AUSTRALIA
REVIEW OF THE SLEEPING BEAUTY

CELEBRATING OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

In 2025, Opera Australia's operatic work was recognised across performing arts awards, underscoring the company's leadership in the artform and its commitment to innovative, collaborative practice.

A defining achievement of the year was the critical success of *Orpheus & Eurydice*, created in collaboration with Opera Queensland and Circa. The production received major honours at Melbourne's Green Room Awards, winning Outstanding Production and Outstanding Direction for Yaron Lifschitz.

The work was further recognised through nominations for Outstanding Performer in a Leading Role for both Samantha Clarke and Iestyn Davies, and for Outstanding Design: Yaron Lifschitz (Set), Libby McDonnell (Costumes), Alexander Berlage (Lighting), and Boris Bagattini (Projections). Orchestra Victoria's conductor Dane Lam was also nominated for Outstanding Musical Achievement.

In February 2026, the production was celebrated at the OperaChaser Critics Awards, where Yaron Lifschitz won Outstanding Director and Iestyn Davies received Outstanding Male in a Leading Role for his portrayal of Orfeo. Highlighting their contribution, the Opera Australia Chorus was awarded Outstanding Chorus, completing a sweep of honours for this boundary-pushing work. These accolades reflect the production's bold integration of music, movement, and design, and its impact on contemporary opera in Australia.

Recognising Opera Australia's repertoire productions, *Carmen* received a Green Room Award nomination for Outstanding Design, acknowledging the work of Marg Horwell and Paul Jackson. The Opera Australia Chorus was also nominated for their work in *Carmen*. *The Barber of Seville* was similarly acknowledged, with nominations for Andrew Moran (Outstanding Performer in a Supporting Role) and Kate Johnson (Outstanding Musical Achievement), demonstrating the continued strength of the company's core repertoire and its artists.

The 2025 Australian Women in Music Awards Opera Impact Award was presented by the Opera Conference partners: Opera Australia, Opera Queensland, State Opera South Australia, Victorian Opera, and West Australian Opera. The award acknowledges a female or gender diverse person working in the field of opera – whether as an artist, creative producer or manager – whose vision, agency, and contribution have significantly impacted the ongoing development of the artform. In 2025, soprano Nicole Car received the

award, recognising her outstanding artistic achievements and her role in advancing the profile of Australian opera on both national and international stages. Nominees Andrée Greenwell and Siobhan Stagg were also recognised for their vision and work in shaping the ongoing development of opera in Australia.

In August, *Gilgamesh* (2024) won two prestigious Art Music Awards: Work of the Year (Dramatic) and Performance of the Year (Notated Composition). *Gilgamesh* was the first English-language opera telling the story of this ancient epic. We congratulated composer Jack Symonds and librettist Louis Garrick, along with our colleagues at Sydney Chamber Opera, Carriageworks, Australian String Quartet, and Ensemble Offspring.



Helen Sherman as Rosina in *The Barber of Seville*, 2025. Photo: Jeff Busby

CELEBRATING OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

Alongside Opera Australia's operatic achievements, our musical theatre work received recognition. The Sydney season of *Hadestown*, presented in partnership with JONES Theatrical Group, was nominated for Best Production of a Musical at the Sydney Theatre Awards. Elenoa Rokobaro received the award for Best Performance in a Supporting Role in a Musical, with Adrian Tamburini also nominated. *Hadestown* also won the Critics' Choice Best Musical at the Sydney Time Out Arts & Culture Awards.

In Melbourne, *Hadestown* was further recognised at the Green Room Awards, receiving nominations for Outstanding Costume Design (Michael Krass), Outstanding Choreography (David Neumann), and Outstanding Musical Direction (Laura Tipoki).

Together these achievements demonstrate Opera Australia's breadth of practice in 2025, from innovative opera to major musical theatre productions. They reflect a company that continues to shape the national cultural landscape through artistic excellence, collaboration, and the outstanding work of its artists.

Behind every performance, our committed and highly skilled teams across administration, production, marketing, education, and technical departments bring the same dedication to excellence. Their collaborative spirit, problem-solving, and passion for the art form are vital to bringing every production to life and supporting our artists and creative partners. Heartfelt thanks to all our teams for their invaluable contributions throughout 2025.



Rising stars Abigail Adriano as Eurydice and Noah Mullins as Orpheus in *Hadestown*, 2025. Photo: Lisa Tomasetti



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

Abigail Adriano
 Annie Aitken
 Stacey Alleaume
 Jonathan Alley
 Richard Anderson
 Maia Andrews
 Christine Anu
 Natalie Aroyan
 Danielle Bavli
 Gordon Bintner
 Jennifer Black
 Jennifer Bonner
 Julian Bonser
 Catherine Bouchier
 Greta Bradman AM
 Kanen Breen
 Abraham Bretón
 Gregory Brown
 Michael Burden
 Chelsea Burns
 Nicole Car
 José Carbó
 Annabelle Chaffey
 Rihab Chaieb
 Alinta Chidzey
 Samantha Clarke
 Olivia Cranwell
 Tomas Dalton
 Iestyn Davies
 Danielle de Niese

Benjamin Del Borrello
 Euan Fistrovic Doidge
 Keara Donohoe
 Anna Dowsley
 Tim Draxl
 Samuel Dundas
 Etienne Dupuis
 Rachele Durkin
 Jesse Dutlow
 Jane Ede
 Malcolm Ede
 Emily Edmonds
 Warwick Fyfe
 Luke Gabbedy
 Ryan Gonzalez
 Julie Lea Goodwin
 Lorina Gore
 Tom Hamilton
 Alexander Hargreaves
 Celeste Haworth-Dias
 Iain Henderson
 Christopher Hillier
 Angela Hogan
 Kiandra Howarth
 Nicholas Jones
 Fiona Jopson
 Reuben Kaye
 Louise Keast
 Jin Tea Kim
 Simon Kim
 Young Woo Kim

Nick Kirkup
 Googoorewon Knox
 Andrii Kymach
 Rosario La Spina
 Tana Laga'aia
 Michael Lampard
 Nathan Lay
 Celeste Lazarenko
 Na Ra Lee
 Alexander Lewis
 John Longmuir
 Shane Lawrencev
 Anthony Mackey
 Serena Malfi
 Virgilio Marino
 Emma Matthews
 Dominica Matthews
 Jonathan McCauley
 Simon Meadows
 Bree Meara
 Ben Mingay
 Andrew Moran
 Eddie Muliaumaseali'i
 Noah Mullins
 Calista Nelmes
 Paul O'Neill
 Phoebe Panaretos
 Ji-Min Park
 David Parkin
 Kristin Paulse
 Olivia Payne

Michael Sumuel as Figaro, Emily Edmonds as Cherubino, and Siobhan Stagg as Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro*, 2025. Photo: Keith Saunders

Eddie Perfect
 Michael Petruccelli
 Heru Pinkasova
 Adam Player
 Margaret Plummer
 Clifford Plumpton
 Sarah Prestwidge
 Haotian Qi
 Eugene Raggio
 Kiran Rajasingam
 Benjamin Rasheed
 Phillip Rhodes
 Shikara Ringdahl
 Elenoa Rokobaro
 Henry Rollo
 Phillipa Safey
 Gerard Schneider
 Alexander Sefton
 Shanul Sharma
 Ryan Sharp
 Sian Sharp
 Dimity Shepherd
 Helen Sherman
 Nicole Smeulders
 Esther Song
 Siobhan Stagg
 Katie Stenzel
 Ruth Strutt
 Michael Samuel
 Adrian Tamburini
 Harry Targett
 Leah Thomas
 Laura Tingle
 Diego Torre
 Ashlyn Tymms
 Leon Vitogiannis
 Kang Wang
 Lyndon Watts
 Danita Weatherstone
 Shanon Whitelock
 Katherine Wiles
 Andrew Williams
 Imani Williams
 Kathryn Williams
 Elias Wilson
 Strickland Young
 Cathy-Di Zhang

CHORUS

Afua Adjei
 Jonathan Alley
 Maia Andrews
 Anna Francesca Armenia
 Damian Arnold
 Matthew Avery
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Emily Edmonds as Cinderella and Emma Matthews as the Fairy Godmother in *Cinderella (Cendrillon)*, 2025. Photo: Rhiannon Hopley

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 Kate Moloney
 Rena Moore
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 Emile Nelson
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The *La Bohème* Children's Chorus performs at the Sydney Opera House, 2025. Photo: Keith Saunders

The continued generous support from our dedicated donors and corporate partners ensures that Opera Australia remains a beacon of artistic excellence, enriching our community with world-class performances, national touring, and professional training for the next generation of artists.

In 2025, our donors and corporate partners supported a diverse array of projects, including:

- Our renewed Young Artist Program launched at the Sydney Opera House thanks to the incredible backing of Principal Patron Maureen Wheeler AO.
- A number of our patrons aligned their support with artists for the first time, including Jenny Crivelli (Young Woo Kim), Robert Marriott and Katie Lahey AM (David Parkin), Sue Edwards in memory of Ted Edwards (Samantha Clarke), and Peter Griffin AM and Terry Swann (John Longmuir).
- Our donors are committed to supporting all elements of opera, from the Mostyn Family Foundation's contribution to the creation of costumes for *Carmen* to the Thyne Reid Foundation's support for our Education, Learning and Participation program.
- The Susan & Isaac Wakil Foundation helped fund our Youth Access Program, which offers \$20 tickets to ensure opera is accessible to all.
- We thank Peter and Melissa Hebbard for hosting the National Tour's final performance celebration in their regional Victorian hometown of Wangaratta.

Our Patron Program is comprised of people whose love of opera inspires them to give generously each season. Every donation helps to sustain our company, ensuring Opera Australia can thrive. 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 2025. 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 – are longstanding supporters, and we are most grateful for their continued commitment. Their contributions help sustain critical artistic programming, artist development, and community engagement activities. As we look ahead, we are committed to deepening our relationships with our patrons, fostering new opportunities for engagement, and ensuring their generosity continues to be recognised and celebrated.

Corporate support plays 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 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

Our deepest thanks to our Patron-in-Chief Dr Haruhisa Handa and the International Foundation for Arts and Culture for generously supporting Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour, one of the pinnacle arts events of the Sydney cultural calendar.

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 more than 50 years.

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

Our sincere 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 2025. 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 OA family.

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“Over the next decade, we want young singers coming out of Opera Australia’s Young Artist Program to have international recognition that they are among the best of the best.”

MAUREEN WHEELER AO

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Opera Australia Hero Partner HSBC hosted a customer night at the Sydney Opera House before a performance of *Carmen* in September. Mezzo-soprano Angela Hogan, one of the four *Carmens* performing across the season, was accompanied by Assistant Chorus Master Michael Curtain. Photo: Good Thanks Media

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Opera Australia's partners play a critical role as ambassadors for opera as an artform, helping ensure it can be shared with as wide an audience as possible.

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



2025 was the 25th anniversary year of the Opera Australia Capital Fund (OACF) and I am delighted to report that, fittingly, the Capital Fund was able to make its largest annual distribution yet, with a grant of \$1.3m to Opera Australia in 2025. After twenty-five years of generous donations received and careful stewardship, OACF continues to provide consistent and meaningful support.

The 25th anniversary provides us with the opportunity to renew our commitment to our founding goal – to help build capital reserves that will provide a regular source of funding for Australia's national opera company. Contributions so far to the 25th Anniversary Campaign have been received from many of our loyal supporters, for which I am sincerely grateful. Our fundraising target of \$7.5m – an increase in OACF's corpus of 25% – is within reach, and after our first year of the campaign we are now more than three-quarters of the way there.

The founding of the Capital Fund was a milestone in the arts in Australia and in the life of Opera Australia. Our work continues to raise funds through a combination of donations and bequests received, and it is heartening to report that the Capital Fund's total equity reached \$37m at the end of the year. My fellow

Directors and I thank all those who contributed in our anniversary year. We take seriously our responsibility to ensure the careful management of the corpus of funds, to deliver long-term growth and return on investment.

Particular thanks go to our Council of Governors, a visionary circle of donors whose generous philanthropic support has underpinned OACF's success. With them and others, in 2025 we celebrated our anniversary year with a stunning dinner in the Long Gallery at the Australian Museum. On that evening, we were thrilled to have two long-standing friends of the Capital Fund – soprano Nicole Car and baritone Etienne Dupuis – perform for guests in honour of our landmark anniversary. We also celebrated in London with a memorable recital and dinner at The Dorchester, with our guest of honour the Australian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom. Our thanks go as always to Dorchester Collection for their support, which makes possible our annual London visit.

Bequests to the Capital Fund are making a lasting impact on OACF's growth and on the future security of Opera Australia. I thank those who chose to include OACF in their Wills, and who notified us of their intentions. Every bequest, large or small, is invested and endures – a far-sighted way to ensure that audiences and opera artists of tomorrow will be able to experience what we enjoy today.

My gratitude also goes to my fellow Directors for their support and dedication to our goals during the year. In particular I salute two long-standing Directors who retired in 2025: David Armstrong AM, whom I succeeded as Chairman, and the Hon. Justice François Kunc have both played vital roles central to OACF's success over many years, and their commitment, counsel, and expertise leaves an important legacy. This legacy became even more significant when with deep regret we learnt of David's death in September. It is a great privilege to have worked alongside both David and François, and to have benefited from their unique insights and perspectives. The Capital Fund flourishes today thanks to their service over so many years.

With my fellow Directors, I thank all those who contributed with confidence to the Capital Fund's work in 2025. For those of us who share a love of opera and a desire to ensure it continues to thrive in Australia, every donation to OACF is a gift to the future, an enduring show of support for this most inspiring of artforms.

SHAUN KENNY, CHAIRMAN

April 2026

In 2025 the Opera Australia Capital Fund marked 25 years of raising funds to secure the future of Opera Australia. Established to support our national opera company for generations to come, the Capital Fund is making a tangible impact every year.

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

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The Capital Fund continues to grow and now makes a significant annual distribution to Opera Australia. This has been made possible thanks to the generous support of a community of donors, all of whom the Capital Fund thanks.

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A bequest 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 would like to discuss either a donation to the Capital Fund or your bequest plans, please contact Nicholas Selman:
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Audience at Great Opera Hits, Sydney Opera House, 2025.
Photo: Daniel Boud

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