

MEDIA RELEASE

19 August 2025

Opera Australia leadership in place with key appointments

The Board of Opera Australia (OA) today announced the appointment of three key leadership positions. These strategic appointments strengthen OA's place as the nation's premier opera company, one of its most important cultural institutions and the largest employer in the performing arts.

- **Chair of the Board:** Professor Glyn Davis AC
- **Chief Executive Officer:** Alex Budd
- **Music Director:** Maestro Andrea Battistoni

The three leaders have decades of combined understanding of OA's purpose and its people, each enjoying a unique connection with the company. Together they will play critical roles in executing OA's strategic vision for the future, and in the continuing recruitment process for a Director of Opera.

Bringing governance excellence to the OA Board, **Professor Glyn Davis AC** commences in his second term as Chair. Outgoing Chair **Rod Sims AO**, after consulting the Board, approached Davis to rejoin when he stepped down as Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in June this year.

"I was delighted that Glyn agreed, and we have been working together since to ensure a smooth transition. His extensive experience and proven track record guiding Opera Australia through the changes the performing arts sector is facing, makes Glyn the ideal leader to help OA navigate our next important chapter," Sims said.

To drive strategic, operational and commercial excellence and take a long-term approach to performance programming, new CEO **Alex Budd** will ensure OA continues to innovate and deepen audience engagement and connection across Australia while balancing artistic ambition with financial sustainability.

With two decades of experience across opera, dance, musical theatre and cultural leadership, Budd is a highly respected senior arts executive who most recently served as Director of Canberra Theatre Centre. There he has overseen significant growth in audiences and commercial outcomes, strengthened the Centre's artistic profile and national partnerships, and progressed the vision and planning for a new 2,000-seat lyric theatre in the nation's capital.

Bringing musical brilliance and a deep knowledge of opera to OA, commencing in January 2026, Italian conductor and composer **Maestro Andrea Battistoni** will oversee all musical aspects of productions and realise the company's artistic vision working closely with the Director of Opera and CEO.

Verona-based Battistoni is recognised as one of the most esteemed conductors of his generation, a regular on the podium in the world's finest opera houses such as Covent Garden, Deutsche Oper in Berlin, Palau del Les Arts in Valencia, Royal Opera House in Stockholm, Teatro Carlo Felice in Genoa and the Sydney Opera House. First attracting international attention at the Verdi Festival in 2010, Battistoni became the youngest conductor to perform at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan in 2012 at only 24 years of age.

Outgoing Chair Rod Sims said, "Opera Australia is in a position of strength. The past twelve months have seen a significant financial recovery and performances that are critically acclaimed and selling to full houses, and the 2026 program has been well received. Opera Australia is now on a sustainable footing and with strengthened leadership is well placed for a vibrant future."

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ATTRIBUTABLE QUOTES

Professor Glyn Davis AC

"The appointment of internationally acclaimed Andrea Battistoni as Music Director brings a familiar and much-loved musical leader to Australia and the Opera. His charismatic style works well with the ambitions of this company to combine global expertise with distinctly Australian voices. Andrea has conducted for Opera Australia since 2018 and we're very much looking forward to him leading the orchestra for *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot* at the Sydney Opera House in 2026. Not to be missed!"

"Alex Budd brings to OA extensive performing arts expertise with proven commercial capability. His leadership will secure an artistically rewarding and sustainable future for Opera Australia. Recent years have thrown some serious challenges at the company, handled with dedication and determination by the Opera Australia team. Alex will build on their achievements and develop new opportunities for partnership and joint productions."

"I am excited by this opportunity to contribute to the vibrant future of Australia's national opera company and to work with its leaders, artists, creatives and employees as OA delivers spectacular performances for diverse audiences."

"On behalf of the Board I express our deepest gratitude to Rod Sims during his three-year term as Chair. Despite COVID and some leadership changes, Rod has ensured OA has achieved some remarkable strategic milestones. He navigated significant challenges and has put OA into a strong position to prosper. I thank Rod for his unwavering commitment and for his passion for the artform as a longstanding lover of opera. I have much appreciated Rod's encouragement and advice in recent weeks as we have prepared for this handover. With colleagues at the company, I look forward to Rod's continued involvement as a valued member of our community."

Andrea Battistoni

"I'm looking forward to returning to Australia and reuniting with colleagues with whom I shared deep musical communication and understanding. The extraordinary dedication of the music staff, the chorus, the orchestra and the soloists, constantly challenging themselves to create unforgettable performances."

"While recognising the value and strength of the Italian repertoire, which will continue to be an essential component, I propose an expansion into other musical cultures. We will aim to offer new stimuli to the audience, the orchestra and the chorus, allowing them to explore different musical languages, from Wagner to Britten, from the French masterpieces to new contemporary works."

"It's also important OA maintains its status as an international house of excellence, reaching for new horizons as well. I'll be nurturing local talent as well as attracting international singers and directors with whom to share important projects."

Alex Budd

"It is a privilege to return to Opera Australia as CEO, an organisation that has shaped my career and which I hold in great affection. This is a genuine homecoming and a deep responsibility to help steer Opera Australia's future, alongside Andrea Battistoni bringing his extraordinary musical leadership and Glyn Davis rejoining the Board as Chair."

"This company holds a special place in Australia's cultural life, and its 70th anniversary invites us to think deeply about the role it will play in the decades ahead. Opera Australia has the chance to redefine what opera means in contemporary Australia. Our responsibility is to ensure opera remains a living, relevant artform - one that challenges, excites and inspires audiences while nurturing pathways for artists and company colleagues who bring it to life. Fulfilling that responsibility means performing at the highest international level while also creating work that speaks directly to Australian audiences today."

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ATTRIBUTABLE QUOTES (continued)**Alex Budd**

"The power of the artform lies in its unique collaboration of music, drama, stagecraft and design, fused into stories that feel both timeless and immediate. OA must lead with that power, presenting the world's great repertoire, nurturing Australian artists, and making opera an essential part of our national cultural life."

"Opera depends on the combined efforts of many - the artists who perform, the colleagues who make the work possible, and the generous supporters and partners across government and the arts industry. I look forward to working across this community as Opera Australia enters its 70th anniversary year, engaging audiences and strengthening the foundations on which the artform will flourish. I am excited to commence in November and to lead the company into its next chapter."

Rod Sims

"It has been an absolute privilege to be Chair of Opera Australia for the past three years, and I'm confident the company will thrive in the years ahead under Glyn Davis's leadership. I'm delighted to have someone with Glyn's skills and professionalism taking the reins."

"After challenging years in 2023 and 2024 it has been terrific to see the turnaround in 2025. Our financial position is sound given the nearly break-even position we will achieve this year, and with a profit very likely in 2026, our performances are critically acclaimed and selling to full houses, and our 2026 program has been well received. The company is now on a sustainable footing and well placed to navigate the inevitable challenges."

"Opera Australia is full of talented people doing amazing things. I want in particular to thank Acting CEO Simon Militano who has led this turnaround and encouraged the people around him to perform above their usual roles. So many people have risen to fill the gaps in leadership. It has been a real team effort to get to where we are now."

"The appointment of Andrea Battistoni as Music Director is a thrilling and essential development in the rebuilding of the company's artistic leadership. Andrea's combination of youth, artistry, and international experience has established him as a hugely respected conductor globally. His highly anticipated appointment will be invaluable to OA's continuing evolution, and commitment to innovation and artistic excellence."

About Opera Australia

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. As we head into 2026, our 70th anniversary year, 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 and nurturing the next generation of artists and creatives.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Andrea Battistoni

Born in Verona in 1987, Andrea Battistoni is widely recognised as one of the most dynamic and internationally acclaimed conductors of his generation. His career took off in the mid-2000s, following early musical studies in cello and composition, and quickly led to debuts with major opera houses and orchestras worldwide. A breakthrough came in 2010 at the Verdi Festival in Parma with *Attila*, where his dramatic flair and musical insight earned both critical and public acclaim. In 2012, at just 24, he became the youngest conductor in the history of Teatro alla Scala, Milan, debuting with *Le Nozze di Figaro* and soon after leading the Filarmonica della Scala in symphonic repertoire.

Battistoni has conducted in many of the world's leading venues, including Deutsche Oper Berlin, Mariinsky Theatre St. Petersburg, Palau de les Arts Valencia, Semperoper Dresden, Royal Opera Stockholm, Sydney Opera House, Teatro San Carlo Naples, Teatro La Fenice Venice, Teatro Regio Turin, Arena di Verona, and the Opéra Bastille in Paris. His operatic repertoire spans Verdi, Puccini, Rossini, Mozart, and beyond, with acclaimed productions such as *Otello*, *Rigoletto*, *Aida*, *Carmen*, *Macbeth*, *Tosca*, *La Bohème*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and *Turandot*.

On the symphonic stage, he has appeared with prestigious orchestras including the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Filarmonica della Scala, Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI, Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, Israel Philharmonic, Concertgebouw Orchestra, and Tokyo Philharmonic. He has held prominent posts as First Guest Conductor of Teatro Regio di Parma (2010–2013), Principal Conductor of Teatro Carlo Felice, Genoa (2013–2019), and since January 2025, Music Director of Teatro Regio in Turin, one of Italy's most prestigious opera houses.

Alex Budd

Alex Budd is a senior arts executive with more than two decades of experience across opera, dance, commercial musical theatre and cultural leadership. Early in his career Alex he was a founding member of Canberra's chamber opera company, Stopera. In 2019 he was appointed Director of Canberra Theatre Centre, returning to lead the organisation where his professional journey began. In this role, he has overseen significant growth in audiences and commercial outcomes, strengthened the Centre's artistic profile and national partnerships, and progressed the vision and planning for a new 2,000-seat lyric theatre in the nation's capital.

In November 2025, Alex returns to Opera Australia as CEO to lead the organisation where he has spent more than half his career, including ten years based in the Melbourne Opera Centre. From 2000-2019 Alex worked in the roles of Tour Manager and then Manager of OzOpera; founding Director of the Enterprises division; General Manager Melbourne and Enterprises, and Executive Producer, Touring and Commercial. In this role, he led Opera Australia's national and schools' opera touring programs; commercial musical theatre; outdoor performances in The Domain and Sidney Myer Music Bowl, and produced 16 New Year's Eve Galas at the Sydney Opera House alongside major tours of *South Pacific*, *The King & I*, *Anything Goes*, *My Fair Lady*, *Evita*, and *West Side Story*.

In addition to Alex's international work in the US, UK and Europe with Opera Australia, his experience abroad includes a year with London's Royal Opera House managing the Paul Hamlyn Performances, and earlier, international touring with Sydney Dance Company taking Graeme Murphy's acclaimed works across Europe, and the Americas. Alex served for seven years on the Federal Government's Playing Australia Committee and currently serves on the Executive Council of the Association of Asia Pacific Performing Arts Centres. He is a former Executive Councillor and current Observer on the Executive Council of Live Performance Australia.

Professor Glyn Davis AC

Professor Glyn Davis AC is a public policy specialist, Emeritus Professor at the University of Melbourne, and Visiting Professor in the Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford. Professor Davis recently completed a term as Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. He previously held leadership roles in the tertiary and philanthropic sectors, including as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne from 2005 to 2018. Professor Davis has long been engaged in the arts, including the boards of the Queensland and Melbourne Theatre companies. He was Chair of Opera Australia from November 2021 to September 2022.

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