

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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# Ambitious Young Artist Program shaping future of opera in Australia



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

Opera Australia has revitalised its Young Artist Program, transforming the initiative to discover and nurture the next generation of Australian opera talent.

The program promises to provide the most comprehensive training available to emerging artists in Australia, helping them develop the skills necessary for a modern career in opera.

At the launch event held in the Joan Sutherland Theatre at the Sydney Opera House, a sense of excitement and optimism permeated the air as Opera Australia unveiled the details of the program.

The first cohort of next generation artists comprising four singers, one répétiteur, and one director, will undergo an intensive, fully paid 18-month journey of development, honing their craft under the guidance of some of the most esteemed names in the opera world.

Hailing from Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney, with backgrounds ranging from Chinese Australian and First Nations to Greek Australian, they are singers Chelsea Burns, Shikara Ringdahl, Elias Wilson and Leon Vitogiannis; répétiteur Jem Herbert and director Claudia Osborne.

Francis Greep, Head of Young Artists, opened the event by sharing his vision for the future of Australian opera: "This is an exciting opportunity. We're building a program that will identify, nurture, and prepare young artists for a 21st-century career in opera. It's about giving them the tools to navigate a profession that demands versatility, independence, and collaboration."

Greep emphasised that the young artists selected for the program demonstrated remarkable qualities both in their auditions and during a three-day workshop held in Sydney last December.

"The artists you meet today didn't just give excellent solo auditions. They showcased their inquisitive natures, their ability to adapt under pressure, and their collaborative spirit," Greep said.

The intensive training regimen for the young artists includes acting, dance, yoga, nutrition, psychology and wellbeing sessions, complemented by language and repertoire intensives in German, French, Italian, Russian and contemporary music.

The rigorous training modules are designed to equip the artists with the skills needed to thrive in a global opera landscape, where multi-lingual proficiency and adaptability are paramount.

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Alongside the talented staff at Opera Australia, the program will feature guest artists of exceptional calibre, including Dr. Ben Schostakowski, Head of Directing at NIDA, and Marie-France LeFebvre, a vocal coach at the Metropolitan Opera.

Opera Australia's commitment to providing world-class instruction is underscored by the addition of several esteemed Australian artists including Yvonne Kenny, Nicole Car, Cheryl Barker, and Peter Coleman-Wright, who will serve as Young Artist Associates, offering their expertise to the next generation of opera stars.

In recognition of the critical support that has made this ambitious program possible, Greep acknowledged the generosity of Maureen Wheeler AO, the Principal Patron of the Young Artist Program.

"None of this would be possible without Maureen's extraordinary vision and support. Her commitment to the future of opera in Australia is nothing short of remarkable," Greep said.

Opera Australia's Director of Development, Rebecca Kitelinger, also spoke at the launch, about the program's significance for both the company and the future of opera in Australia.

"Opera Australia has a long history of training the next generation of artists, with many former Young Artists regularly performing with us each season. Today's launch stands on the shoulders of that fantastic work and pushes us to take this program to the next level.

"We commit not only to the future of opera in Australia, but to fostering our artists' incredible gifts while centering our program on the whole person, and how each young artist can have a sustained successful career in opera long after they leave our rehearsal studios. I'm personally thrilled to watch them grow as artists over the next 18 months." Kitelinger said.

"Opera Australia's Young Artist Producer, Jane Hennessy, echoed this sentiment, speaking about the program's deep impact.

"By welcoming young artists into our company, we're part of an important exchange. The artists bring diverse voices and fresh perspectives that help us push creative boundaries and question traditional approaches. We're not just developing voices; we're supporting artists who can navigate and ultimately help lead a changing artistic landscape," Hennessy said.

"Through this program, we're deepening our partnerships with conservatories, theatre companies and tertiary institutions across Australia, while building performers who understand both their artistry and their role in shaping opera's future," Hennessy added.

A highlight of the event was the performance by the four young singers with pianist Jem Herbert and directed by Claudia Osborne. Their impressive renditions captivated the audience and showcased the immense potential of this cohort.

As the next generation of opera artists take their first steps into the spotlight with the support of Maureen Wheeler AO and a talented team of mentors, Opera Australia is committed to keeping opera at the heart of Australian culture and ensuring this much-loved artform is accessible to all.

*For more information regarding Opera Australia's Young Artist Program, visit [Opera Australia's website](#).*

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