MEDIA RELEASE

5 November 2026

Long-awaited Melbourne premiere of *Watershed: The Death of Dr Duncan* recounts devastating turning point in Australian LGBTQI+ history



"*If I could, I would give it six stars*. ★★★★★" - Limelight

Acclaimed operatic oratorio *Watershed: The Death of Dr Duncan* will have its long-awaited Melbourne premiere, bringing a confronting chapter of Australia's LGBTQI+ history to the stage at Playhouse, Arts Centre Melbourne from 21-28 November.

Directed by Australian theatre and opera legend Neil Armfield, *Watershed* tells the true story of Dr George Duncan, a University of Adelaide lecturer who drowned in the River Torrens, the alleged police cover-up and the following public outrage that ultimately led to the decriminalisation of homosexuality in South Australia in 1972. It took almost a decade for Victoria to follow in 1981.

A searing examination of homophobic violence, institutional accountability and the fight for justice, *Watershed* received five-star reviews and emotional standing ovations at its sold-out 2022 Adelaide Festival premiere and subsequent Sydney Opera House season in 2024.

"We commissioned *Watershed* to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of Dr Duncan in Adelaide, allegedly at the hands of off-duty members of the SA Police vice squad engaging in their habitual practice of 'teaching the poofters to swim'," says director Neil Armfield.

"Fifty years on, our country has changed. Gay rights are entrenched, partly as a result of society's revulsion as details emerged of Duncan's death. But the targeting of groups for reasons of race, of religion, of difference, is still rife. This work is a cry against hatred, a cry for love and for justice." he said.

Multi-award-winning author Christos Tsiolkas and playwright Alana Valentine have crafted a searing libretto from press clippings, inquest transcripts, private correspondence and monologues spanning five decades of anti-gay violence, while Joseph Twist's transcendent score will be performed by the Orchestra Victoria under the baton of leading Australian conductor Brett Weymark.

Original cast members, tenor Mark Oates and bass Pelham Andrews will reprise their critically acclaimed roles, joined by Blake Appelqvist in their debut as the Lost Boy, and the Opera Australia Chorus.

Watershed is a thrillingly physical oratorio that features powerful choral music, solo voices and dance in a shattering but illuminating commemoration of a dark turning point in Australian history.

OPERA AUSTRALIA | A 70 YEARS

Creatives

Conductor **Brett Weymark**
Composer & Orchestrator **Joseph Twist**
Libretto **Alana Valentine, Christos Tsiolkas**
Director **Neil Armfield**
Revival Director **Cheryl Pickering**
Set & Costume Designer **Ailsa Paterson**
Lighting Designer **Nigel Levings**
Choreographer **Lewis Major**
Historical Consultant **Tim Reeves**
Sound Designer **Jim Atkins**
Video Designer **Sean Bacon**
Dramaturg **Alan John**

Cast

Duncan/Dunstan **Mark Oates**
Mick O'Shea/Cop/Lawyer **Pelham Andrews**
Lost Boy **Blake Appelqvist**
Dancer **Sebastian Geilings**

Opera Australia Chorus
Orchestra Victoria

Performance information

7.30pm
21, 25, 26, 27, 28 November
2:00pm
22 November

Running time

Approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes.

Performed in English.

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

Bookings

Adult tickets from $59 (fees may apply)

Opera Australia Box Office
(03) 9685 3700
www.opera.org.au

Playhouse, Arts Centre Melbourne

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