Rehearsal room: Chorus members, Stephen Marsh (The Giant), Simon Bruckard (conductor)
Photography: Beata Bowes, Scott Whinfield
VICTORIAN OPERA PRESENTS

THE SELFISH GIANT

YOUTH OPERA – NEW WORK

Based on the short story by Oscar Wilde
Librettist Emma Muir-Smith
Composer / Conductor Simon Bruckard
Director Cameron Menzies
Set & Costume Designer James Browne
Lighting Designer Eduard Inglés
Choreographer Elizabeth Hill-Cooper

CAST

The Giant Stephen Marsh
Spring Saffrey Brown
First Fairy Stephanie Ciantar
Second Fairy Chloe Maree Harris
Winter Olivia Federow-Yemm
Snow Michael Dimovski
Frost Darcy Carroll
Wind Noah Ryland
Child 1 Eliza Bennetts O’Connor
Child 2 Olivia White
Child 3 Sophie McGetrick
Child 4 Carmen Hammelmann

Youth Chorus
Victorian Opera Chamber Orchestra

16–19 October 2019
Gasworks Theatre, Albert Park

WORLD PREMIERE
The running time is approximately 1 hour and 10 minutes, no interval
Sung in English
PRODUCTION TEAM
Production Manager Peter Darby
Stage Manager Emma Wenlock-Bolt
Costume Supervisor Melissa Sergeant

MUSIC STAFF
Repetiteurs
Phillipa Safey, Phoebe Briggs

CHORUS
Soprano
Samantha Hargreaves
Hayley Jobson
Sofia Laursen Habel
Harmony Lee
Miriam Whiting-Reilly
Danielle Zuccala
Jasmine Zuyderwyk

Mezzo Soprano
Zoe Brunsdon
Jessica Rose Clancy
Gwyneth Cleary
Brianna Ekberg
Elena Griffiths
Lyla Levy-Jordan
Saskia Mascitti
Zoya Mclean
Olivia O’Brien

Tenor
Michael Hammelmann
Julian Howes
Denny Lin

Bass
Caleb Jarcevic
Callum MacDonald
Nicholas Sheppard
David Wang

ORCHESTRA
Violin 1 Peter Clark
Violin 2 Jessica Oddie
Viola Susanna Ling
Cello Rebecca Proietto
Harp Julie Raines
Oboe / Cor Anglais Jasper Ly
Clarinet / Bass Clarinet Luke Carbon
Piano Phillipa Safey
Percussion Arwen Johnston

SEASON STAFF
Mechanist Adam Brunskill
Dresser Nathan Burmeister
Pattern Cutter Nicole Serjeant
Maker Bridie Wilkinson

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Secondments
University of Melbourne
Angela Katherine McStephen
Melbourne Polytechnic
Stage Management: Steven Tanner, Andrew Hughes
LX Crew: Bradley Sutton, Rosa Angelica Ochoa Chavez
Wardrobe: Heidi Brooks, Meg Nichols, Jaimi Richards
COMPOSER’S NOTE

The first opera I ever played was the youth opera program at Victorian Opera in 2009. My good friend at university Emma Muir-Smith had put her name down to be a part of the two-week long sing through of Puccini’s Gianni Schicchi and convinced me to come along to observe. In typical fashion for Richard Gill, then Artistic Director of Victorian Opera, I ended up playing piano in the rehearsals and Emma sang one of the roles. Since that moment, I was hooked on opera and inspired to pursue a career in the arts.

So when Emma first approached me with the idea to write a youth opera adaptation of The Selfish Giant, I leapt at the opportunity. It has been an incredible journey from those initial conversations to finally rehearsing and performing this piece on the stage.

The challenge of writing music for young people is to find a musical language that is both accessible and interesting. The very opening of the show was the first musical idea that I wrote, and a lot of the piece is developed from that motif. Most of the characters however inhabit quite different musical worlds. You might hear the influence of Richard Strauss in the Spring fairy’s song, and Kurt Weill and Cole Porter in the slapstick buffoonery of Snow, Wind and Frost. And I couldn’t resist putting in a few quotes from Gianni Schicchi as a tribute to the first opera I learnt.

Richard Mills’ commitment to commissioning new work and creating educational opportunities for young people is extraordinary, and I couldn’t be more grateful for the opportunity to write and perform this piece. But ultimately this show is about the experience of the young cast in its performance. I hope that we’ve been able to create something that they can enjoy and relate to. And who knows, perhaps some of the people on stage, performing in their first ever opera, will be inspired to keep performing and write a show of their own.

SIMON BRUCKARD
Composer / Conductor
LIBRETTIST’S NOTE

In 2008 I was in Year 12, and, not knowing much about opera but knowing I loved to sing, auditioned for Victorian Opera’s then Youth Opera – The Happy Prince by Australian composer Malcolm Williamson, based on the short story by Oscar Wilde.

Working with Richard Gill and Victorian Opera, it was the best two weeks of my musical life. In addition to the opera itself, I learnt renaissance country dances, some obscure grammatical rules, and developed an impressive right bicep from holding a parasol for two weeks straight.

I walked away feeling challenged and inspired, and the experience directly set me on a path to study music at university, where I met a brilliant pianist on my first day of orientation: Simon Bruckard. Five years later, we found ourselves in the same Developing Artist program at Victorian Opera, and spent two years immersed in the work of the company. A large portion of this time was spent either workshopping or performing new Australian works – something Simon and I both developed a passion for.

When I was searching for a story to adapt into an opera, tenor Carlos Barcenas suggested I have a read of Oscar Wilde’s The Selfish Giant, one of his favourite childhood stories (it was only much later that I made the Oscar Wilde connection between it and The Happy Prince). From there, Simon and I set off on what was to become a four-year journey from conception to completion.

Writing an opera (it turns out) is no small task, but along the way we’ve had a brilliant time, and we’d like to thank Victorian Opera for all of their support during the development of The Selfish Giant.

We hope that you, our audience, will fall in love with this story as much as we have, and that everyone involved in the project has had an unforgettable experience these last two weeks – both Simon and I know firsthand how genuinely life-altering these opportunities can be.

EMMA MUIR-SMITH
Librettist
Every day, the local children play in the Giant’s beautiful garden. When he returns from holiday, the Giant is outraged that the children have taken over his garden and puts up a fence with a sign saying: NO CHILDREN ALLOWED.

The next morning, Spring and her fairies attempt to wake up the garden, but it doesn’t work.

Snow, Wind and Frost are looking for a place to call home when they spot the Giant’s sign. Winter encourages them to take over the garden and they waste no time, destroying the garden and accidentally putting a hole in the fence.

Years pass and Winter continues to rule the garden. The passing children reminisce about how much fun it was to play there. The Giant recalls his beautiful garden and wonders what he has done to end up with a garden so grey.

One day the children are playing when their ball goes through the hole in the fence. They start climbing into the Giant’s garden, but one child is hesitant to enter, afraid that the Giant will catch them. Winter, Wind, Snow and Frost are horrified by the presence of children in the garden. Slowly, the garden begins to change; flowers bloom and Spring returns. Seeing all her friends having fun, the hesitant child summons up the courage to enter but gets stuck in the fence.

The Giant discovers the children in his garden and angrily releases the child from the fence. He berates her for trespassing, but she helps him understand that his wonderful garden is the best place to play and draws his attention to the colours finally returning. The Giant is convinced to play with the children and he takes down the sign and invites them to return every day.

The four seasons resume their cycle and for many years children continue to play in the garden. The Giant reflects on how wonderful his life has been and the joy that his garden has brought him. One morning, as Spring and her fairies start waking up the garden, the Giant does not stir from his chair. The children come together to lay flowers over him.
SIMON BRUCKARD
Composer / Conductor

Composer, conductor and pianist Simon Bruckard works regularly with Victorian Opera and Opera Australia in Melbourne and Sydney. In February 2019 Simon conducted La bohème in an outdoor performance for Stonnington’s ‘Opera in the Park’ program. For Victorian Opera, he has conducted Hansel and Gretel, Alice Through the Opera Glass, The Pied Piper, Remembrance and The Grumpiest Boy in the World. He is also passionate about education, presenting many workshops for young people and devising education materials for major arts organisations around the country. Next year Simon will conduct The Pied Piper in Hobart for Victorian Opera.

EMMA MUIR-SMITH
Librettist

Emma Muir-Smith is a writer, director and performer, and a graduate of the MA Text and Performance at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA)/Birkbeck. Her recent work includes National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain 2019 Inspire residency/tour (assistant/tour director), Alice Through the Opera Glass (libretto) for Victorian Opera, Top of the Hill (writer/performer), Surrogacy (dramaturg/director), and Terra Nullius (writer/performer) all at RADA, and Cool Air (director) for London Lovecraft Festival 2019. Emma performs professionally as an opera singer throughout Europe and Australia and holds a MMus (Opera Performance) from the Victorian College of the Arts and Music. She was a Developing Artist with Victorian Opera 2014-2015.

CAMERON MENZIES
Director

International director Cameron Menzies works consistently across opera, music theatre, theatre, cabaret and with many international festivals. His work has been seen throughout Australia, United Kingdom, Europe, South Africa, Japan and China. He has worked for Shakespeare’s Globe, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Diva Opera UK, Opera Australia, Victorian Opera, Malthouse Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company, MSO and SSO. He is a Helpmann and Green Room nominated director. Some credits include the national tour of Hair the Musical, Sister Act The Musical, The Vaults UK, Lucia di Lammermoor UK and Australia, Yma Sumac: The Peruvian Songbird, Don Giovanni, Madama Butterfly, and La bohème.
STEPHEN MARSH
The Giant

Stephen is a Victorian Opera Emerging Artist. He currently holds a Melba Trust Scholarship and is part of Melbourne Opera’s Richard Divall Emerging Artist Program. After participating in several Victorian Opera Youth Operas, Stephen made his professional debut in the company’s Sleeping Beauty in 2017. Since then he has been a regularly featured artist with Victorian Opera, performing roles in Hansel and Gretel, Heroes and Villains, The Snow Queen, Pelléas et Mélisande, Parsifal, Alice Through the Opera Glass, and Heroic Bel Canto. In 2018, Stephen was the winner of the ‘Melbourne Welsh Male Choir Singer of the Year’ Competition, second place recipient of the inaugural ‘Limestone Coast Aria’ Competition and a finalist in the Herald Sun Aria Competition.

JAMES BROWNE
Set & Costume Designer

James’ credits as Set and Costume Designer include for Hayes Theatre: Cabaret, The Detective’s Handbook, Dogfight, Xanadu; for Monkey Baa Theatre Company: Pete the Sheep, Josephine Wants to Dance; for Regal Theatre: Strictly Ballroom; for Seymour Centre: Fat Swan; for Sydney Opera House: Just for Laughs, Velvet, Miracle City, Limbo Unhinged, HAIR; for Theatre Royal/Shanghai: Side by Side; for CDP: Spot the Dog, Mr Stink, Turns, The Very Hungry Caterpillar; for Griffin: Diving for Pearls, Beached, Ladies Day; for NTOP: The Red Tree; for TOHO: Ghost the Musical (Tokyo); for SLS Las Vegas: Blanc de Blanc. Next year James will design The Bridges of Madison County in Sydney and Menopause the Musical - new Australian tour.

EDUARD INGLÉS
Lighting Designer

Eduard has created lighting designs for some of the most prestigious dance, theatre, and opera companies in both Europe and Australia. Since moving to Melbourne from Barcelona in 2004, he has worked as a designer for theatrical productions and exhibitions such as The Key (Dislocate), Dance of the Bee (Astra), Rembrandt’s Wife (Victorian Opera), Racing Gallery (National Sports Museum), If These Walls Could Talk...? (Dislocate), The Second Hurricane (Victorian Opera) and others.
THANK YOU

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