

VICTORIAN OPERA

CALVIN BOWMAN

THE MAGIC PUDDING THE OPERA



Education Resource

The Magic Pudding - The Opera

Education Resource

This resource contains two parts.

Part one includes background information for teachers to assist them in preparing their students to attend the opera.

Part two is a series of activities that can both assist students to prepare for the opera or be worked on afterwards.

Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| PART ONE..... | 3 |
| 1. Cast..... | 3 |
| 2. Orchestra..... | 3 |
| 3. Creative Team..... | 3 |
| 4. Regional Touring..... | 3 |
| 5. Background information: The book, <i>The Magic Pudding</i> by Norman Lindsay..... | 4 |
| 6. <i>The Magic Pudding - The Opera</i> synopsis..... | 4 |
| 7. The Composer - Calvin Bowman..... | 8 |
| 8. The Librettist - Anna Goldsworthy..... | 8 |
| 9. Anna and Calvin on creating <i>The Magic Pudding - The Opera</i> | 9 |
| 10. The music of <i>The Magic Pudding - The Opera</i> | 10 |
| 11. The libretto of <i>The Magic Pudding - The Opera</i> | 11 |
| | |
| PART TWO - ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS..... | 12 |
| 1. Read the story..... | 13 |
| 2. Explore the language of <i>The Magic Pudding</i> | 13 |
| 3. Explore the references to Australian culture..... | 13 |
| 4. Create a visual representation of the story 'slices'..... | 13 |
| 5. Create a performance of the story 'slices'..... | 13 |
| 6. Understand the people and the orchestra..... | 14 |
| 7. Understand the instruments..... | 15 |
| 8. Describing the music..... | 16 |
| 9. Responding to the opera..... | 16 |
| Solutions..... | 17 |
| | |
| VICTORIAN OPERA INFORMATION..... | 18 |
| Acknowledgements..... | 18 |

The Magic Pudding - The Opera

Education Resource

PART ONE

1. Cast

| Character | Singer | Voice Type |
|------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Narrator | Georgia Wilkinson* | Soprano |
| Bunyip Bluegum | Nathan Lay | Baritone |
| Bill Barnacle | Timothy Reynolds | Tenor |
| Sam Sawnoff | Brenton Spiteri | Tenor |
| Pudding | Jeremy Kleeman | Bass |
| Watkin Wombat/Rooster | Shakira Dugan* | Mezzo Soprano |
| Possum | Shakira Tsindos* | Mezzo Soprano |
| Judge | Carlos E. Bárcenas | Tenor |
| Constable/Henderson Hedgehog | Douglas Kelly* | Tenor |
| Benjimen Brandysnap | Stephen Marsh* | Baritone |

*Developing Artist

The show will feature a community chorus in Bendigo and Wodonga.

2. Orchestra

1st violin, 2nd violin, viola, cello, double bass, flute, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, percussion, piano

3. Creative Team

| | |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| Conductor | Fabian Russell |
| Director | Cameron Menzies |
| Set & Costume Designer | Chloe Greaves |
| Lighting Designer | Peter Darby |
| Puppetry Consultant | Lynne Kent |
| Puppet Construction | Vanessa Ellis |
| Repetiteurs | Phillipa Safey |
| | Phoebe Briggs |

4. Regional Touring

In 2018 *The Magic Pudding – The Opera* continues Victorian Opera’s commitment to community engagement and opportunities for young singers. This work will include a chorus of local singers from each of the communities in which the work is performed, including children and adults. Five Victorian Opera Developing Artists are included in the cast of *The Magic Pudding – The Opera*.

The Magic Pudding - The Opera

Education Resource

5. Background information

The book, *The Magic Pudding* – by Norman Lindsay

The original book was written in 1917 by the artist Norman Lindsay and published the following year. He wrote it partly to settle a debate he was having with his friend Bertram Stevens as to whether children preferred to read about fairies or food. To settle the debate Lindsay wrote a children's book about food, and the rest is history. It has been translated into many languages and published in both Britain and the United States. It is considered an Australian classic and has been reprinted many times.

6. *The Magic Pudding – The Opera* synopsis



Slice One

Mr Bunyip Bluegum, a koala, follows the scent of pudding until he comes across Bill Barnacle the sailor, Sam Sawnoff the penguin and Albert the 'cut-an'-come-again' Pudding. Albert is a Magic Pudding, as the more pudding you eat the more you get. He is however, a very grumpy fellow. Bill and Sam invite Bunyip to join them for a lunch of Pudding. After their meal, as Bill sings of how they met Albert, Watkin Wombat and Possum (The Puddin' Thieves) appear. Sam punches Possum and knocks Wombat to the ground. The Puddin' Thieves scurry off without stealing the pudding. Albert sings of how terrible his life is, stuck as a pudding in a pot. Bill and Sam ask Bunyip to join them as Puddin' Owners.

The Magic Pudding - The Opera

Education Resource



Slice Two

Wombat and Possum have started a fire to create a huge distraction. They enter dressed as firemen to put out the fire. While everyone is distracted, Wombat makes off with Albert. The three distraught Puddin' Owners set off in search of the thieves. Along the way they encounter Rooster, Possum and Henderson Hedgehog. Bill, Sam and Bunyip arrive at Watkin Wombat's Summer Residence where Bunyip pretends to be a door-to-door salesman. Wombat and Possum fall for the trick and the Puddin' Owners are able to snatch Albert back.



The Magic Pudding - The Opera

Education Resource

Slice Three

The following morning Wombat and Possum once again trick the Puddin' Owners and run off with Albert. Bill, Sam and Bunyip struggle to escape. Luckily they are rescued by a dog called Benjimen Brandysnap.



Bunyip plans an Official Grand Procession to lure the Puddin' Thieves. Wombat has Albert hidden under his hat, so Bunyip tricks Wombat into removing his hat by singing 'God Save the King'. Bill and Wombat get into a fight, and the pudding falls off Wombat's head. Again the Puddin' Thieves have been thwarted.

The Magic Pudding - The Opera

Education Resource



Slice Four

As a gang of four, Bill, Sam, Bunyip and Benjimen arrive at Tooraloo. Wombat and Possum, disguised as respectable townfolk, accuse the Puddin' Owners of stealing their pudding. They make a big commotion and the police arrive. Albert insults the policeman and then pinches him. The policeman has no option but to arrest Albert on the grounds of Puddin' Assault.

In the Tooraloo court, Wombat and Possum are in the dock accused of Puddin' stealing, Bill acts as the prosecuting lawyer with Benjimen Brandysnap and Sam Sawnoff as witnesses. Albert objects to the evidence and tries to start a fight. Bunyip pretends that Albert has been poisoned, and the Judge – who has eaten seven slices – has been poisoned seven times. There is chaos in the courtroom.

The Puddin' Thieves run away and the Puddin' Owners have Albert back. Bill, Sam, Bunyip, Benjimen and Albert all live happily together.



The Magic Pudding - The Opera

Education Resource

7. The Composer – Calvin Bowman



Calvin Bowman was born in Ararat, Victoria, in 1972.

He is a graduate of the University of Melbourne, and was the first Australian to graduate with a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Yale University, with the assistance of a Fulbright scholarship. He is a former Senior Lecturer in Composition and University Organist at the Australian National University.

Calvin's major focus as a composer is in the composition of art song. To date he has written nearly a hundred songs, with more constantly on the way.

Calvin's interest in vocal music led naturally to the composition of two operas. *Lost to the Music*, to a libretto by John Marsden, was written for the National Boys' Choir, whilst *The Magic Pudding - The Opera* was commissioned and premiered by Victorian Opera in 2013.

8. The Librettist – Anna Goldsworthy



Described by *The Australian* as a 'musical ambassador', Anna Goldsworthy is one of Australia's most versatile artists. Celebrated as a pianist, she is acclaimed also as a memoirist, essayist, playwright, librettist, and festival director.

As a writer, Anna was awarded Newcomer of the Year at the 2010 Australian Book Industry Awards for her debut memoir, *Piano Lessons*.

As a pianist, Anna performs extensively throughout Australia and internationally. An accomplished chamber player, Anna is a founding member of Seraphim Trio. Celebrated for its innovative programming and community outreach, Seraphim is committed to new Australian music, and has premiered works by many Australian composers.

Anna has degrees from the University of Adelaide and Texas Christian University, and a doctorate from the University of Melbourne.

9. Anna and Calvin on creating *The Magic Pudding – The Opera*

1. How did the writing of this opera come about?

Anna - Richard Mills suggested we create a children's opera, and because we both had young sons at the time, and because it was clear to me that Calvin's great melodic gift would charm children as much as it does adults, I readily agreed.

Calvin - Richard Mills commissioned Anna and I to write the work for VO's 2013 season.

2. How and why did you choose *The Magic Pudding* story to create an opera?

Calvin - We were searching for ideas, and I'd been reading '*The Magic Pudding*' to my son, Oscar. I suggested it to Anna, and she thought most favourably of the idea.

Anna - I distinctly remember catching up for a coffee with Calvin on the back porch of my house at the time, in Brunswick. We threw around a few ideas – favourite children's books – and then when Calvin mentioned that he often read *The Magic Pudding* to his son it seemed clear that this was our project: its great characters; its intrinsic Australianness; the mythic quality of the Pudding; the song that infuses each of its pages.

3. How did you collaborate in terms of creating the libretto and music?

Anna - We figured out an overall structure and sequence, discussing which parts we could bear to leave out, and then I winnowed down the existing material, versified much of it, and devised linking couplets. Sometimes Calvin came back to me with a request for an addition or modification, but for the most part he simply shut himself in a room with a piano and worked his magic.

Calvin - We pretty much did our separate things. Although Anna took on board a couple of little ideas of mine initially, she fashioned the libretto entirely by herself, and then I set it to music. It really was that simple.

4. How do you see the story of *The Magic Pudding* speaking to a contemporary Australian audience?

What do you see as its relevance today?

Calvin - I think the emphasis on food, the knockabout characters, and Norman Lindsay's irrepressible humour all contribute to making his work a timeless classic. As such, it's every bit as relevant today as when it was penned.

Anna - I suppose it just speaks to our ongoing need to have a national mythology, which often takes the form of celebrating the rogue.

5. How did Australian speech rhythms influence your word setting?

Anna - I was drawn to the vernacular for its colour and music.

Calvin - Not at all! I don't think there is anything inherently 'Australian' about my compositional style either. But I am completely subservient to the words and how their sentiments may be realised in music.

10. The music of *The Magic Pudding – The Opera* – The score composed by Calvin Bowman

1. In writing *The Magic Pudding – The Opera* what were the key influences on your compositional choices?

My compositional choices are completely dictated by the feeling of the words.

2. How would you describe the music?

The music is generally light and clear. The style is mine! But I guess it's a mixture of many people I admire from throughout the ages. Beethoven makes an appearance, for example, as does Carl Stalling (who wrote the music for Warner Brothers cartoons). The melodies I write are what I would like to think of as generous. The harmonies are fairly straightforward in the main, although as plot lines become more complicated so does the harmonic language.

3. What musical traditions did you draw on for composing this opera?

There are bits and pieces from throughout the ages which go into making up my musical language. Amongst the strongest influences, I think, are those of certain British composers of the first half of the twentieth century.

4. How did you musically create the specific characters? How did you decide on which voice types you wanted for the particular characters? Do they have their own style and themes for instance?

Characters are musically created through what they are saying and their actions. Voice types were determined by the cast available for the première. There are no particular themes or styles associated with any of the characters. In this sense, the music is 'through-composed'.

5. The instrumentation creates a very specific feel in the music. What was your intention with the instrument choices?

The instrument choices were dictated by the practical necessity of having to take the show on the road in as compact a manner as possible. That said, I can't imagine 'Pudding' with a full symphony orchestra backing! The size of the orchestra is reminiscent of the salon orchestras of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and as such suits the opera perfectly I think.

11. The libretto of *The Magic Pudding – The Opera* – the words written by Anna Goldsworthy

1. What are the specific elements and requirements you need to consider when creating a libretto from an existing story?

Compression (making the story shorter); dramatic structure and dramaturgy; singability.

2. How does the existing text influence your writing?

Enormously, in this case. I wasn't especially interested in 're-imagining' it, simply in bringing the original text to life as an opera.

3. What were the particular considerations you needed to take into account for creating the libretto for *The Magic Pudding*? For example, when writing this libretto how did you decide which of the original text to incorporate, and which you needed to adapt to make it work as a libretto?

A few characters and incidents had to be eliminated, just in the interests of time. We considered whether all those incidents advanced the action, but also preserved segments of the original story because of colour or comedy.

4. When writing elements of the story to be spoken, put into recitative or sung, what influenced that particular choice?

On a very basic level, recitative advances the action – it represents a type of engine – whereas a song offers the opportunity to dwell within a moment. We figured out where our great moments needed to be and figured the rest out from there.

5. How do you create character in your writing of libretto?

The same way as in fiction: voice, motivation, gesture, etc. None of these characters is exactly a creature of nuance – one of the delights of the book is the cartoonish characterisation – so it was a question of figuring out each character's agenda and vocal tics and then running with that.

The Magic Pudding - The Opera

Education Resource

PART TWO – ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

“The Arts enable students to develop their creative and expressive capacities by learning about the different practices, disciplines and traditions that have shaped the expression of culture locally, nationally and globally. Students are both artist and audience in the Arts. They make and respond and learn to appreciate the specific ways this occurs in different disciplines.”

<http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/the-arts/introduction/about-the-arts>

The following activities are intended for various ages and skill levels. They can be complete activities in themselves or included as part of a unit that the school/teacher devises to support an excursion to *The Magic Pudding – The Opera*. These activities can also be done at home.

The activities suggested in this resource have been designed in accordance with the Victorian Curriculum for the following learning areas and capabilities.

The activities correspond to the Victorian Curriculum as follows.

| ACTIVITIES | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| LEARNING AREAS | | | | | | | | | |
| The Arts - Music | | | | | | | | | |
| The Arts - Drama | | | | | | | | | |
| The Arts – Visual Arts, VCD | | | | | | | | | |
| English | | | | | | | | | |
| Languages (German) | | | | | | | | | |
| The Humanities | | | | | | | | | |
| THE CAPABILITIES | | | | | | | | | |
| Critical and Creative Thinking | | | | | | | | | |
| Intercultural | | | | | | | | | |
| Social and personal | | | | | | | | | |

The Magic Pudding - The Opera

Education Resource

Activity No. 1 – Read the story

Read *The Magic Pudding* by Norman Lindsay. It can be sourced on the following website
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/23625/23625-h/23625-h.htm>

Discuss the story of each 'slice' with the rest of the class.

Activity No. 2 – Explore the language of *The Magic Pudding*

Discuss the use of language in *The Magic Pudding*.

- Do people you know speak like any of the characters in the story?
- Do you know the meanings of the unusual words?
- Are some words made-up or changed?
- Can you still understand the meaning of these words? Why or why not?
- Why might Norman Lindsay have used words this way?

Choose two or three of the poems, ballads or songs and compare them for similarities or differences. (Spanish Gold or Breakfast Ballad are good examples)

- Do the verses rhyme?
- Can you find patterns in the way these verses are written?
- Write your own poem with the same rhyming patterns.

Activity No. 3 – Explore the references to Australian Culture

Discuss what it is about the names of the people and places that sounds Australian. What Australian things do you recognise?

Make a list of Australian animals, trees, plants and places, including those with Indigenous names. How many can you find?

Activity No. 4 – Create a visual representation of the story 'slices'

Divide into four groups. Assign a 'slice' to each group.

Design a mural, group art work or storyboard for each slice.

Activity No. 5 – Create a performance of the story 'slices'

Divide into four groups. Assign a 'slice' to each group.

Create a short play acting out each slice. Some of the group may need to be houses, trees, fire, etc. Discuss how this might be achieved.

Each group performs their 'slice' to the other groups in order of the slices.

The Magic Pudding - The Opera

Education Resource

Activity No. 6 – Understand the people and the orchestra

Draw a line to connect the words with their correct definition.

| Word | Definition |
|---------------|---|
| Composer | Instruments such as the flute, oboe, clarinet and bassoon. |
| Librettist | When the musicians check their pitch against a set or given pitch and adjust to correct it. |
| Audience | Singing different notes at the same time. |
| Orchestra | Music consisting of just the instruments. |
| Woodwind | A person who writes the music. |
| Brass | Singing the same notes at the same time. |
| Strings | The printed music that the conductor uses to direct all the musicians and singers. |
| Percussion | Music that is sung. |
| Tuning | The stick the conductor uses. |
| Orchestra Pit | A person who writes lyrics and words. |
| Conductor | Instruments that need to be hit to make a sound. |
| Baton | The people who are watching the show. |
| Score | Instruments such as the violin and cello. |
| Instrumental | The place where the musicians perform during the show. |
| Vocal | An ensemble of musicians with instruments from the string, woodwind, brass and percussion families. |
| Unison | Instruments such as the trumpet and trombone. |
| Harmonies | The person who leads the orchestra and interprets the music. |

The Magic Pudding - The Opera

Education Resource

Activity No. 7 - Understand the instruments



Above is a picture of the instruments in an orchestra. In *The Magic Pudding - The Opera* a touring ensemble is used. Next to each instrument used in *The Magic Pudding - The Opera* write which family of instruments they belong to.

| Instrument | Instrument Family |
|-------------|-------------------|
| violin | |
| viola | |
| cello | |
| double bass | |
| flute | |
| clarinet | |
| bassoon | |
| trumpet | |
| percussion | |
| piano | |

The Magic Pudding - The Opera

Education Resource

Activity No. 8 – Describing the music

After watching the performance, discuss the types of sounds a composer might use when writing music for such a story like this one.

Write a list of musically descriptive words that would be suitable for the fire scene. Students can select words from the list below or think of their own.

Discuss the answers when finished.

| | | | |
|--------|-----------|------------|-------------|
| Slow | Fast | Long notes | Short notes |
| Low | High | Smooth | Rhythmic |
| Calm | Energetic | Dark | Bright |
| Happy | Soft | Loud | Sparse |
| Gentle | Exciting | Tense | Bouncy |

Activity No. 9 – Responding to the opera

Read the following questions. You may have other questions to add to the list that you think are relevant to your experience.

- What did you like about the opera?
- What did you dislike?
- What did you think about the sets, props and costumes?
- What did you think of the singers' portrayal of their characters?
- Would you have done something differently? Why?
- What were you expecting?
- Did it live up to your expectations? How?

Discuss your reactions with your fellow students and/or teacher.

The Magic Pudding - The Opera

Education Resource

SOLUTIONS

Activity No. 6 – Understand the people and the orchestra

Composer - A person who writes the music.

Librettist - A person who writes lyrics and words.

Audience - The people who are watching the show.

Orchestra - An ensemble of musicians with instruments from the string, woodwind, brass and percussion families.

Woodwind - Instruments such as the flute, oboe, clarinet and bassoon.

Brass - Instruments such as the trumpet and trombone.

Strings - Instruments such as the violin and cello.

Percussion - Instruments that need to be hit to make a sound.

Tuning - When the musicians check their pitch against a set or given pitch and adjust to correct it.

Orchestra Pit - The place where the musicians perform during the show.

Conductor - The person who leads the orchestra and interprets the music.

Baton - The stick the conductor uses.

Score - The printed music that the conductor uses to direct all the musicians and singers.

Instrumental - Music consisting of just the instruments.

Vocal - Music that is sung.

Unison - Singing the same notes at the same time.

Harmonies - Singing different notes at the same time.

Activity No. 7 – Understand the Instruments

| Instrument | Instrument Family |
|-------------|-------------------|
| violin | strings |
| viola | strings |
| cello | strings |
| double bass | strings |
| flute | woodwind |
| clarinet | woodwind |
| bassoon | woodwind |
| trumpet | brass |
| percussion | percussion |
| piano | percussion |

The Magic Pudding - The Opera

Education Resource

VICTORIAN OPERA INFORMATION

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