

# VICTORIAN OPERA



## A Christmas Carol

### Education Resource



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## About this resource

This resource is designed for school students in Years 7-12. Activities can be used in the classroom alongside or separate to Victorian Opera's on stage and digital access production of *A Christmas Carol*.

The activities provided in this resource align with the below Victorian Curriculum Learning Areas:

- Music
- Drama
- Visual Arts

The table below outlines how the activities designed around each Learning Area align to the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities.

CAPABILITIES	Literacy	Numeracy	ICT	Critical and Creative Thinking	Personal and Social	Ethical Understanding	Intercultural Understanding
<b>Music</b>							
Activity 1	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Activity 2	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Activity 3	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Activity 4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<b>Drama</b>							
Activity 1	✓		✓	✓			✓
Activity 2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Activity 3	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
<b>Visual Arts</b>							
Activity 1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Activity 2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Activity 3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Activity 4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Activities designed for students in Years 11 and 12 have been done so in accordance with the VCE Study Designs for:

- Music Composition and Styles
- Visual Communication Design
- Drama



## About the work

### Synopsis

#### Stave one: Marley's Ghost

It's Christmas time and Ebenezer Scrooge is grumpy. He hates Christmas and doesn't understand why people use the season as an excuse to be merry. Freda, his niece, pays him a visit at his office and they get into a debate about the custom. Freda advocates for the holiday and the charity and generosity it inspires in people, but Scrooge simply dismisses her arguments and asks her to leave. After she departs, Scrooge turns to his clerk Bob Cratchit and begrudgingly grants him a day off for Christmas all the while complaining about his loss of profit and demands that he is in earlier on Boxing Day to make up the time.

On his walk back home, Scrooge is stopped by a Big Issue vendor, a charity collector and a junkie all of whom ask something of him. He denies them all handing out insults as he passes them by. As he takes out his key to open his front door he notices the face of his old business partner, Jacob Marley, in the intercom, but it disappears as quickly as it appeared.

He goes inside, climbs the stairs to his bedroom where he locks himself in, changes into his pyjamas and sits down in front of the television. Before long, the face of Marley appears again, this time on the television screen and as Scrooge stands up to investigate, all of the electrical appliances in his house go off at once causing a cacophony of sound. The sounds cease suddenly and booms from the cellar are heard, growing stronger as they come towards Scrooge's bedroom.

The ghost of Marley enters the bedroom and is followed by a long chain made of mobile phones, tablets, laptop computers, briefcases, cash-boxes, express post envelopes, spreadsheets, keys, padlocks and the like. After he finally convinces Scrooge of who he is, he explains that his heavy chain represents the wealth he sought in his life and the neglect he paid others and how he is destined to carry it with him. Marley warns Scrooge that if he doesn't change his ways he will be much worse off. He tells Scrooge that he will be visited by three spirits over the next few nights and bids him to take note of the lessons for the sake of his soul.

#### Stave two: The first of the three spirits

Scrooge wakes up at midnight and lays in bed for an hour awaiting the arrival of the first spirit. Sure enough, when the clock strikes one the room fills with light, and Scrooge finds himself face-to-face with the Ghost of Christmas Past.

She leads him to a country town in Victoria and Scrooge recognises it as the place where he was born. The Ghost explains that what they see are shadows of things that have been and that no one will be able to see them. They find a young boy in the local school sitting alone at Christmas time, reading books. Recognising himself, Scrooge reflects on the joy and company the characters brought him in his loneliness and considers the way he treated a young caroller the night before.

They journey to another Christmas a few years later and Scrooge's sister Fan, Freda's mother, join him at the school to tell him that his father has allowed him to come home for Christmas. Next, the Ghost takes him to Fezzolis, an Italian Grocers where Scrooge was an apprentice as a young man. It's Christmas Eve and Mr Fezzoli tells young Scrooge and his fellow apprentice Dino Valentino to close up shop so they can set up for the Christmas feast. Scrooge had forgotten about Fezzoli's generosity at Christmas time, and it makes him think about his behaviour towards his own employee, Bob Cratchit, and how he should perhaps be a little kinder.

In the next instance, Scrooge and the Ghost are watching his younger self speaking with Belle, Scrooge's ex-fiancé. Belle is crying and in the process of breaking up with Scrooge who she claims no longer cares for her and their future but is instead distracted by his business and making money. After this memory, Scrooge doesn't want to see anymore but at the Ghost's insistence he is forced to watch how Belle, now married and a mother, learns about how Scrooge was seen working while everyone else had begun their Christmas celebrations and his business partner Marley was dying.

Upset by this memory and the selfishness displayed, Scrooge looks for a way out and in his struggles with the Ghost, he manages to extinguish its light and finds himself back home in his own bedroom.

#### Stave three: The second of the three spirits

The next night the second spirit, a jolly giant with a surfboard, appears and introduces himself as the Ghost of Christmas Present. He takes Scrooge to the Victoria Market on Christmas Eve and they watch as people hurry

about picking up supplies for the following day. They travel into the suburbs and arrive at the Cratchit house on Christmas morning where Belinda Cratchit, Bob's wife, is preparing Christmas lunch. Their eldest daughter, Martha, arrives with the ham, while Bob and Tiny Tim return home from the hospital, where Tiny Tim received treatment for his illness. After they eat, Bob proposes a toast to his boss, Scrooge, which the rest of his family begrudgingly participate in. Upon request, Tiny Tim sings a song about Melbourne, the different people who live in and arrive to the city and the importance of being generous and kind to each other.

During Tiny Tim's song, Scrooge and the Ghost travel to Freda's house where she and her guests are playing a game of charades. Freda's friend is miming out what appears to be an animal and Freda ends up guessing the correct answer: Scrooge. Her friends admire her for being so gracious towards her Uncle but Freda reminds them that it's his own fault for missing out and despite his rudeness wishes him a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

Before the Ghost leaves, Scrooge asks him if Tiny Tim will live. The Ghost gazes into the future and foresees an empty wheelchair, saying the Cratchit family will experience a lot of pain. As he fades away, he quotes Scrooge and his words about Christmas. The bell strikes twelve, the Ghost disappears and Scrooge remembers the voice of Marley who warns the third spirit will arrive on the third night when the last stroke of midnight has struck.

#### **Stave four: The third of three spirits**

The final spirit arrives in a coat that completely conceals it except for an outstretched hand. Scrooge asks if they are the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come but the Ghost does not say anything, instead points onward with its hand.

They arrive at what looks like a bar where two people briefly discuss (and celebrate) the death of a man before moving onto other topics of conversation. Not quite sure why the Ghost has brought him there, Scrooge assumes there is some sort of lesson for him. Before he knows it, they are at a pawn shop where a junkie is selling off some items he stole from a house. He tells the shop owner that he found the owner dead inside and couldn't believe how much stuff he had.

Suddenly, they're in a dark house and a bed with the dead person is in front of them. The Ghost indicates to Scrooge to pull the sheet away, but he refuses to do so and begs to leave, becoming more agitated by the second. The Ghost reveals a room where a woman and a man are celebrating the death of their landlord, especially as they couldn't afford to pay the rent and weren't expecting any grace from him.

They both travel through the streets and arrive back at the Cratchits' house where everyone is seated quietly inside. Tiny Tim has passed away and they reflect on the patience and kindness Tiny Tim displayed, promising each other to remind themselves of these values in his honour.

Scrooge turns to the Ghost to ask who the lonely dead man was and in response, the Ghost takes him to a cemetery where they stop in front of a grave. Scrooge reads the tombstone and sees his own name inscribed on it, suddenly understanding that he had died and that everyone was celebrating his death. He pleads with the Ghost to tell him what he can do to change his fate, promising to honour the spirit of Christmas from that day forth, but the Spirit just fades away.

#### **Stave five: The end of it**

Scrooge wakes up the next morning and repeats his promise to honour the spirit of Christmas each day and week of the year. On seeing his watch on his arm he's relieved to find that he was never robbed and exclaims that his new life starts today. He's lost track of days with the visits by the spirits. He opens the window, puts out his head and asks a passing boy what day it is, to which the boy replies, it's Christmas Day.

Happy not to have missed the festivities, he remembers seeing an enormous turkey at the market and orders it for the Cratchits, revelling in the joy it will bring them. He leaves the house and as he walks he greets passersby, gives a lot of money to a big issue vendor and stops to pat dogs and talk to the homeless. He stops in front of Freda's house, nervous to go in but eventually rings the doorbell. Freda is surprised by his arrival but happy to welcome him in.

The next day, Bob Cratchit arrives to work late, and Scrooge pretends to tell him off before giving him a pay rise and offering to take Bob out for a beer to discuss how Scrooge can help his family.

The three Ghosts appear one last time to watch how Scrooge lived up to his word, learning how to celebrate Christmas better than anyone.

## Creative Team

Composer Graeme Koehne  
Librettist Anna Goldsworthy  
Conductor Phoebe Briggs  
Director Emma Muir-Smith

Set Designer Claudia Mirabello  
Costume Designer Bridget Milesi  
Lighting Designer Richard Vabre  
Sound Designer Jim Atkins

## Characters, cast and voice types



**Samuel Dundas**  
Ebenezer Scrooge  
Baritone



**Simon Meadows**  
Marley / Ghost of Christmas  
Present  
Baritone



**Antoinette Halloran**  
Freda / Ghost of Christmas  
Past / Woman in a bar / Junkie  
woman / Tenant woman  
Soprano



**James Egglestone**  
Bob Cratchit / Fezzoli /  
Belle's Husband / Man in a bar  
/ Pawnbroker / Tenant man  
Tenor



**Dominica Matthews**  
Mrs Fezziwig / Belinda  
Cratchit / Party guest 1  
(Cathy)  
Mezzo soprano



**Akansha Hungenahally**  
Chorus / Belle / Young Fan /  
Martha  
Mezzo soprano



**Nadine Dimitrievitch**  
Puppeteer



**Anderson Mokyiu**  
Tiny Tim / Child Scrooge /  
Children's Chorus  
Soprano



**Maxwell Chao-Hong**  
Tiny Tim / Child Scrooge /  
Children's Chorus  
Soprano



**Shakira Dugan**

Chorus / Charity Collector 2 /  
Party Guest 2  
Mezzo soprano



**Michael Dimovski**

Chorus / Street Vendor /  
Fishmonger / Party Guest 2 /  
Big Issue Vendor  
Tenor



**Stephen Marsh**

Chorus / Young Scrooge /  
Charity Collector 1 / Butcher /  
Party Guest 4  
Baritone



**Emily Burke**

Chorus / Poulterer  
Soprano

## **Chorus**

Community Chorus

The Decibelles Choir  
Low Rez Choir

Country Child /  
Cratchit Child 1

Sophie Cowall  
Milia Dee  
Isla Goding  
Jin Jin Li  
Michelle Lung

Country Child /  
Cratchit Child 2

Alec McMichael  
Mathew Rigby  
Michael Roskam  
Alyssa Schiavello  
Zara Tonon



## Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was an English novelist from the Victorian Era and is considered to be one of the best authors of his time. Some of his works include *A Christmas Carol*, *David Copperfield*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*.

Dickens was the second of eight children born to John and Elizabeth Dickens. His father worked as a payroll clerk for the navy but had a tendency to spend a lot of money, more than the family could afford. When Dickens was twelve, his father was sent to prison for debt, so he was forced to leave school to work in a factory for a year. This experience left a deep impression on the young Dickens and the life of lost, oppressed and bewildered children would become central characters in several of the stories he wrote.

After his work at the factory came to an end, he returned to his studies but eventually left at the age of fifteen after which time he tried out a few different careers, including a clerk in a solicitor's office, a shorthand reporter in the lawcourts and a parliamentary and newspaper reporter. It was during his work in these different posts that he became familiar with the legal world enough that he was comfortable to use this knowledge in his literary works. Despite writing a number of different novels, many of which were published in sections as part of a serialisation in magazines or newspapers over a few years, he would continue to work in journalism both as a journalist and editor for the rest of his life.

In 1858, he began to give public readings of his work which were a combination of oratory and passionate acting. He had at one point in his life seriously considered becoming an actor and had an audition organised at the Lyceum Theatre, London, however he fell ill on the day and was not able to attend. His readings were very popular, and he continued to give them for the rest of his life, at one point undertaking an extensive reading tour of America.

In 1834, he met Catherine Hogarth who became his wife two years later, and they had ten children together. However, their marriage wouldn't last and they separated in 1857 at which time Dickens met Ellen Ternan who would be his companion until his death. The tours took their toll, and his health became more precarious in the last few years of his life. He gave a final tour of London in 1870 and died suddenly in June of the same year. He is buried in Westminster Abbey in London.

### Literary style

Dickens' fiction portrayed the cruelty, ugliness and inequality of society in the Victorian Era using satire, melodrama and humour. Given many of the novels he wrote were episodic, he became the master of cliffhangers, ending each episode in a manner that left his readers engaged and interested.

Each of his characters were integral to the storyline, no matter how small a part they played. He gave thought to their names as not only did he want them to appeal to his audience, but he also wanted their names to tie in with the characters' personalities. He also connected his characters with their surroundings to enhance their uniqueness and he often created landscapes and residences that corresponded to the core of the character.

While other Victorian Era authors used unbelievable or unrealistic circumstances to add a twist to the storyline, Dickens did so instead to remind his readers that good will always prevail and win over evil. This is a theme that returns time again in his novels and short stories.



Image 1



## ***A Christmas Carol*, the novella**

Written in 1843, Charles Dickens' novella, *A Christmas Carol*, is considered one of his most popular works of fiction.

The story first came about after Dickens visited Manchester, a city in England, where he saw first-hand the mistreatment of children and young people who were made to work like slaves in workshops and factories. He felt the urgent need to find a way to educate poor people and he began working on a tale that would help to open the hearts of the wealthy and powerful towards the poor. Using Christmas as the setting on which his story would take place, he aimed to appeal to the sentimentality and generosity of the season and get his readers thinking about their own charity to others less fortunate, not only at Christmas time but throughout the whole year.

*A Christmas Carol* was written over a period of a few weeks and published in late 1843. It was so popular that over six thousand copies of the first edition were sold by Christmas of the same year. Its popularity encouraged Dickens to write a new Christmas-themed story each year, which he did until 1867, three years before he died, however, none of the Christmas stories that followed were as popular as *A Christmas Carol*.

Some of the themes that this novella deals with include generosity, regret, moral responsibility and the Christmas spirit. While on his journey through time with the three Christmas spirits, Scrooge witnesses acts of generosity in his old mentor Fezziwig who would throw his employees wonderful Christmas parties as a way of saying thanks for their hard work, and his clerk Bob Cratchit, who despite being the subject of poor treatment, extends a toast to Scrooge on Christmas day. While watching these and other scenes unfold in the streets of London, Scrooge feels regret and becomes aware of the way in which he can help those in need through his own generosity.

Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* has been adapted and parodied countless times across a number of mediums and styles including theatre, film (both live-action and animated), television, radio, opera, ballet, graphic novels and comic strips.

## The Arts – Music

### What is opera?

Opera as a European art form has been in existence since the 1600s, and became especially popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Today there are many styles of opera performance, but they all have one thing in common – an opera is a play that is sung.

The predominant languages of opera are Italian, French, German and English.

The main difference between opera and music theatre is amplification: music theatre is usually amplified while opera is not. In addition, music theatre usually includes spoken dialogue as well as music and dance. Opera, on the other hand, uses recitative – a singing style designed to imitate natural speech.

### Where did opera come from?

The origin of opera can be traced back to the Ancient Greeks, who lived over 2,000 years ago. The advances in society that this sophisticated civilisation developed included the invention of a city-state (*polis*) resulting in a golden age of culture, music, art, poetry and drama, including beautiful sculpture, remarkable architecture and the creation of classical poetry such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer. Ancient Greece had a profound influence on the discovery and advancement of science, physics, maths, astronomy and geometry, producing the influential philosophers Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Cicero, who approached the big questions of life often in a genuine scientific way, daring to question and challenge traditional conventions and prejudices of their age. The Ancient Greeks also loved the theatre, with playwrights including Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides writing enduring works that informed the future dramatic structures of playwriting.

In the following thousand years, much of the knowledge and skills established by the Ancient Greeks were lost, particularly in the sciences and arts. For example, the art in what we refer to the Middle Ages had lost some of the scientific application that had made Greek art and sculpture so lifelike. From about the 1300s, Italian scholars set out to rediscover many of the Ancient Greeks' innovations. This period was called the Renaissance, which translates literally as 'rebirth'. Founded in Florence, it marked a period of enlightenment and the rediscovery and study of culture, philosophy, art, architecture and science. During this era, highly influential artists contributed a vast wealth of knowledge. Some of which include musicians, philosophers, writers and mathematicians such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Botticelli, Raphael, Donatello, Galileo, Shakespeare, Erasmus and Copernicus. One art form the Renaissance scholars were particularly interested in was Greek theatre. The texts had survived time, but the performance practice indications had been lost. Scholars knew from writings by philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato that the plays were accompanied by music, and that this helped raise the emotional impact of the works. But how? What did the music do? How were the lines sung?

The Florentine Camerata, a group of thinkers and musicians from Florence, met regularly to determine how the musical accompaniment might have sounded and supported the text. They invented a new art form in which the dialogue in a play would be sung. They decided to call the new art form 'opera', which simply meant 'a work'. The first truly successful opera was called *L'Orfeo*. It was composed by Claudio Monteverdi and is still performed today.

Following the great success of this work, opera became popular all over Europe and then the world. The style of opera, and the way it was performed, developed over the centuries to reflect the culture of the time. At its height in the 1800s, opera was performed regularly in theatres in every major city.

## Voice types and singing styles

There are seven voice types in opera, each of which is defined by the range of notes they can sing and their vocal quality.

There are three female operatic voice types, although most operas only have soprano and mezzo-soprano roles.

- Soprano – the highest sounding female voice, with a vocal range from middle C up to the C two octaves above.
- Mezzo-soprano – slightly lower than the soprano, with a vocal range from the G below middle C to the A two octaves above.
- Contralto – the lowest sounding female voice and rarely used in opera today. The vocal range for this voice type is from the F below middle C to a high F one octave above.

There are four male voice types, although the countertenor voice is mainly used in operas from the Baroque period (1600-1750).

- Countertenor – the highest sounding male voice, with almost the same vocal range as a mezzo-soprano; the G below middle C to a high F one octave above.
- Tenor – a high sounding male voice, that usually takes the leading male role. The vocal range for this type is roughly from the C below middle C to the C above.
- Baritone – the middle sounding male voice with a vocal range from the second G below middle C up to the G above.
- Bass – the lowest sounding male voice, which has a vocal range from the E above middle C to the E two octaves below; however, some bass singers can sing lower.

This diagram illustrates where each voice type sits on a music stave.



There are further categories of voice, defining the kind of voice quality and the type of music they can sing. The composer will consider voice types to highlight the different characters – for example, to differentiate between a King and a Servant, or a Princess and a Witch.

A few of these are:

- Coloratura – a very high range with the ability to sing complicated parts with agility
- Dramatic – a heavy sounding, powerful voice
- Lyric – an average sized voice with the ability to sing long, beautiful phrases
- Heldentenor – the ‘heroic tenor’, a very big role that requires a powerful sound

Follow the links below to hear examples of what these voices sound like:

Classical female voices – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIPFAww8X-U>

Classical male voices – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRL7shs23Wc>

## Orchestration

The orchestral music for *A Christmas Carol* is being performed by Orchestra Victoria and is made up of 39 musicians. The orchestration includes the instruments listed in the table below.

Instrumental family	Instrument
Woodwind	Flute Oboe Clarinet Bassoon
Woodwind	French Horn Trumpet Trombone
Percussion	Timpani Bass drum Snare drum Tubular bells Glockenspiel Large gong Crash cymbals Suspended cymbal Triangle Woodblock Tambourine
Keyboard	Piano
Strings	Violin Viola Cello Double bass Harp



## Interview with the librettist, Anna Goldsworthy

### **What were some of the parameters you were given when asked to write *A Christmas Carol*?**

We weren't given a lot of parameters really, we were just asked to do an adaptation of it ideally set...even now I can't remember if that was part of the original brief, whether it had to be set in contemporary Australia or if that was an idea that we developed. It may have been. Richard Mills may have come to us with the notion that we might sort of contemporise it in some kind of way and whether we would set it in Melbourne or Adelaide or a fictional city, I think was essentially up for grabs. But we settled for Melbourne in this instance.

### **What are some of the challenges involved in writing a new adaptation of a story that is so familiar to so many people and that has already been adapted in so many ways?**

I suppose if you thought about it too much that legacy would be intimidating and overwhelming, but I chose not to dwell on that. Instead, I dived into the text. In a way the reason it has been adapted so many times and has had so many other iterations is that it's just a really extraordinary and archetypal piece of writing, to the extent that it's furnished us with a lot of cultural references. Things like Scrooge or the Ghost of Christmas Past, these have just entered our collective imagination now. So, it's a story that in some ways has the resonance of myth even though it was a construction of the nineteenth century.

I suppose rather than being overwhelmed by its cultural import, instead of that I chose to lean into what made it such a seminal text. Those very qualities that have made everyone want to adapt it I think clearly lend themselves to a contemporary adaptation of Melbourne too. These have to do with the dramatic structure and the tautness of the dramatic structure and in a way that made my job as a librettist much easier because I felt the dramaturgy was already there.

Then beyond that, there's something so universal about Dickens' themes of generosity and inequality and I suppose the meaning of Christmas, and by extension what it is to be a human with a social conscience, that I felt these were really applicable to our own time. In some ways more than ever. I mean inequality is still a massive problem, greed is still a massive problem and a whole lot of things in contemporary society are only exacerbating these problems for us. It's really interesting to re-examine this text through the prism of our own era.

### **Can you talk about the process behind writing a libretto. What research do you do before or even during the writing process and where do you begin when you start to write?**

I guess I started with a re-reading of the book, which is a book I've read many times over the years since I was first gifted it by my great-grandmother, when I was a young child. Then I had conversations with Graeme but also with Richard. First of all, you just want to get the parameters fleshed out: how are we going to structure this? How many roles are there going to be? One thing I was keen to do was to see a little bit more diversity in the story and I feel this is a reflection of where we are now in terms of our expectations of what we see on stage. And gender, there just weren't enough singing roles for women also. From a compositional point of view, I figured it would be good for Graeme to have access to a few more sopranos and mezzos rather than them being more cameo roles or bit parts or wives or mothers. For that reason, I changed the nephew Fred to a niece called Freda. I made a few tweaks to start with and formulated a few broad, brush stroke ideas of what we might do with it.

How we transpose it not just to this era but also to this country where Christmas looks quite different to what it looked like in Victorian England. A lot of the aesthetic of *A Christmas Carol* is sort of interior and wintery and snowy and cozy and it's to do with the hearth and fires inside burning and so on. Trying to think about what an Australian Christmas looks like and how we've realised some of the feeling of that book and its very different climactic context, so one obvious change I made was to the Ghost of Christmas Present. He's a wonderfully hedonistic character in the original who is wearing his fur-trimmed gown and is surrounded by beautiful rich Christmas fare. I was trying to think of what a contemporary Australian iteration might look like with such a person, and I thought maybe a surfer who is really fully partaking of that Australian version of hedonism: the outdoors and to the abundance and copiousness to the way he acts. Graeme's composed really the most deft and charming and witty music for him, I'm really delighted with that.

So I had these broad brushstrokes of what I wanted to do with it. Then I just went through it sequentially and dealt with it bit by bit. The book is composed in such a way that the sections are really clear. I extracted a lot of the dialogue from the Dickens to start with and versified it, but then I realised that was a little bit too much of

a literal approach and I didn't really need to go through everything that was said in the text in order to make it work, although that remained a kind of guide for me. Instead, I paired that right down and thought about what I would need to do to progress the story at this point.

Opera is such an interesting form which operates in a sort of stop-start effect, you move the dramatic action along and then you reflect on it or you bask in an emotional moment, that's when you have an aria. You don't actually have as much time for the mechanics of action as you do in a novel or in a piece of straight theatre because there are all these moments of stopping and glorying in the moment. So thinking about that dramatically and how to make that work. But essentially that's what I did and then just shot off a scene at a time of what I'd done to Graeme and asked for a bit of feedback, realised that I needed to pair it down even more. There's a huge number of words that you lose when you're making the transition from a book to an opera because there's not actually that many words to play with in an opera libretto. That's, I suppose, what our creative process was.

**You spoke briefly about the dramaturgy that exists already in Dickens' work. Is it more difficult writing a libretto for a well-known work than a new work or is it easier because the text exists?**

I love adaptation. I mean the last libretto I did for Victorian Opera was an adaptation too, which was *The Magic Pudding*. I think just more broadly as a writer I quite like working from found material and being resourceful and working out what to do with it. It's sort of easier. There's a wonderful liberation in a purely creative project in which you have to entirely create your own scaffolding, and often that emerges over the course of creation; that's if you're working on a work that's complete fiction. But even in my work more broadly as a writer beyond writing libretti, I've written a couple of memoirs and again I like that because you're dealing with found material but you're trying to work out how to arrange it artistically in a way that creates a satisfying narrative. It's a challenge I relish.

**Can you explain the relationship between the librettist and composer a little? What do you each need from each other to do your individual work and how collaborative is your relationship?**

Graeme is a dear friend and colleague and I have a huge amount of respect for him. We had a lot of conversations of what this might look like, and I really enjoyed that. But after we'd had these conversations we went our own ways and I did my thing and shot it through to him and he did his own thing. It was actually lovely. We had the opportunity for some workshops in Melbourne earlier this year and there were a few places where Graeme had tweaked the words a little bit to fit it but then I was able to go back and rewrite them a bit so it satisfied me from more of a literary perspective. So, there was a little bit of toing and froing but on the whole there wasn't that much. I mean I had my job, I delivered it to him and now we're at the pointy end of his job which is writing and scoring.

**The design team in an operatic production often need to make considerations for singers when designing the costumes or the set. Are there any considerations that you need to make as the librettist when writing the text?**

I guess one consideration is working it out so it's not a cast of thousands. Really thinking about who can be cast and who can be doubled up and making sure there's not too many people on stage at the one time and so on. Thinking about voice types that ideally complement each other in a way that makes it a meaningful opera. If you're going to cast a mezzo or an alto, ideally you'd want to have enough for them to sing so there are these kind of practical considerations. In a way, Emma has been really good at raising various flags about that, so that's been quite useful.

What I love about opera is that it's such a profoundly and deeply collaborative art form, everyone is cooking it up together. The lion's share of the artistic responsibility I think lies with Graeme. I mean I feel basically like I've created a roadmap to enable his creativity to shine and so in that sense, I'm not overly precious about a libretto. I don't think it's a standalone definitive work of art that I'd then anthologize, particularly one like this which is an adaptation. But what I'm keen to do is create something that fires up Graeme's imagination and allows him to shine.

But then regardless of how great the music is that issues from Graeme's pen, if we don't have a really fabulous team putting it on, then it's not going to be exciting and enlivening. The joy of opera is the conflation of these elements and the way they actually come to this result that transcends to the sum of their parts. That's why when opera works, it really works, and it delivers this entirely immersive experience that can be truly transporting. But it does mean that to some extent there's an element of surrender when you are part of that process. You can't own the whole thing; you can't be too obsessive compulsive or controlling about it and you just have to trust that there's going to be a good synergy in the team. I feel really confident of that in this



production. I think working with Graeme, working with Emma, working with this outstanding cast of singers and all the support of Victorian Opera to me, if that's not a winning combination I don't know what is.

**Where did your interest in music and words begin?**

They were both always there for me and I used to be hugely conflicted about needing to choose one over the other, wondering am I a musician, am I a writer? What am I, what am I? Eventually I just thought I have to find a way to live with them both, which is not always easy just because there's a limited number of hours in the day and I have this other job now too, directing the Conservatorium of Music [in Adelaide]. It's all a bit of a juggling act. But at some stage I made peace with the fact that they were both really important to me and I had these two strings of expression that I didn't feel I could let go of. I had a wonderful piano teacher from an early age, my dad is a writer so there were always books in the house, so I grew up in a bit of hothouse environment for both of these art forms. It's a huge privilege to have that.

In a way, writing opera and writing libretti is lovely for me because it represents a fusion of these things. I do write musically. I do hear music when I write, or I certainly feel the rhythms when I write. The songs that I might be hearing in my head as I'm writing a libretto are not necessarily the ones that Graeme will cook up, but I think the fact that there is a musical genesis behind them, I'm hoping it makes his job a bit easier that I have an understanding of the mechanics of music.

**Have you got any advice to anyone interested in pursuing a career as a musician or a writer?**

Well, it's a hard road so don't do it unless you really have to, but then if you have to, throw yourself into it and make it work. These things have never been more important. I just feel passionate about our need to reconnect with our humanity in any way we can as the world becomes increasingly alienating and computerised I suppose. I think there's a danger that we lose these things that really matter, which are the lifeblood of art. It's about connectivity, it's about humanity, it's actually about beauty. Let's not forget about beauty. We've all got this impulse that needs to be nourished by beauty. So, if you have to be an artist, then please do and give it your all.



## Activities

### For Years 7-8

#### Activity one: Instruments of the orchestra

Look at the list of instruments that make up the orchestra of *A Christmas Carol*, provided on page 12 of this resource and use the [MSO Learn app](#) to explore the different sounds each instrument makes.

Then, choose your favourite instrument from the list and write a short story that explores its look, shape, sound, timbre and history. Take turns to read your story out to your classmates.

#### Activity two: Aural analysis

Listen to the music that has been composed for the character of the Ghost of Christmas Present by Graeme Koehne at the beginning of Act II. Before you do, read the description of the character that Anna gives it in her interview on pages 13-15 of this resource.

Then, discuss the following points as a class:

- How does the music at the beginning of this act match Anna's description of the character?
- What elements of music can you hear?
- How do the elements used shape the character and mood of the music in this section, both in the orchestral and vocal parts.
- Name the instruments you hear in the orchestra.
- What is the voice type of the singer playing this character?

### For Years 9-10

#### Activity three: Rhythmic and melodic dictation

Clap and play the below rhythmic and melodic dictations and ask your students to transcribe what they hear. Students can have four listens for each rhythmic dictation and six for the melodic dictation.

Be sure to give your students the time signature for each excerpt as well as the first note for the melodic dictation.

Rhythm 1 – Time signature: 3/8



Rhythm 2 – Time signature: 4/4



Melody 1 – Time signature: 4/4



#### Activity four: Compose a vocal melody

Below, you'll find three different text excerpts from the libretto of Victorian Opera's *A Christmas Carol*. Choose one to compose a melody for.

Consider the character the text is sung by and what voice type they are. Character voice types can be found on pages 6-7 of this resource and a description of the vocal range for each can be found on page 11.

If you haven't already watched the production, read the synopsis on pages 4-5 of this resource to get a sense of your character's role in the entire work. How will you use the elements of music in your melody to reflect the character's text?

##### SCROOGE

*It's not convenient and it's not fair,  
but I am, alas, miserably aware  
that if I were to do the fair thing and dock your pay  
you'd send your union thugs my way.  
You refuse to admit I'm being ill-used.  
It's a scandalous form of financial abuse!*

##### CHRISTMAS PAST

*Scrooge was better than his word.  
He did all of this and more;  
He helped Tiny Tim, who did NOT die,  
And who he came to love and adore.  
Some laughed to see the change in him  
But Scrooge simply did not care.*

##### JUNKIE

*I don't know much about their owner  
but there's nothing much to dread.  
I saw a window ajar at his house  
and climbed in and found him DEAD.  
He had two laptops and three mobile phones  
and a fitbit that's never been used  
These noise-cancelling headphones were still in their pack.  
There was so much there to choose!*

#### For Years 11-12

##### Activity five: Compose the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come

The character of the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come in both Dickens' original novella and Victorian Opera's production is an unspoken role but nonetheless an important one in the storyline.

For this activity, compose some music that represents this character for you, based on the character presented in Dickens' story. To familiarise yourself with the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, read 'Stave 4: The Last of the Spirits', which can be [found online](#).

Your composition:

- Should be no more than ninety seconds in length
- Can be written for either an ensemble or solo instrument
- Needs to use one of the following categories of compositional devices
  - Repetition – where a musical pattern is established and used again in its original form.
  - Variation – where an established pattern is used again but with modification.
  - Contrast – where significant new musical material is introduced or where significant changes are made to established musical patterns.

Present your composition to your classmates and discuss your composition process, how you utilised various elements of music, as well as the compositional device you chose and how you used it.

If you were aiming to create a specific character, mood or atmosphere, ask your classmates to describe what they heard before you reveal what you were aiming for.

## For Years 11-12

### Activity six: Explore Graeme Koehne's compositions

Do some research on Australian composer Graeme Koehne and write a 1,000 word essay that explores his composition style.

In your essay, choose one of his orchestral, chamber and solo instrumental works to analyse. Listen to a recording of each work and discuss the following:

- What is the background of this work?
- Are there any particular characters that come through?
- How does he utilise the elements of music to create certain effects?
- What do you like and dislike about the work?



### Interview with the director, Emma Muir-Smith

Emma Muir-Smith, the director of Victorian Opera's *A Christmas Carol* discusses some of the themes central to this adaptation of Dickens' story as well as the influence the music has on the way she directs.

She also talks about how the elements of drama are incorporated into this production and the advantages of being a singer previous to becoming a director.

#### **I imagine by now you are familiar with Charles Dickens' novella, *A Christmas Carol*. When did you first encounter this work?**

It's funny because it's a work that is so familiar to so many people. We've all heard of Scrooge; we might describe somebody as a Scrooge if they're grumpy or stingy or whatever. But I hadn't actually read the original story or seen any of the adaptations, including *The Muppets' Christmas Carol* which I am told is brilliant, until I was asked to direct this. That was my first encounter with *A Christmas Carol* in a focused, deliberate way.

It's such a wonderful work and I think it's so timeless. Its values and morals and themes are so relevant today that I can see why it's been adapted so many times, why there is *The Muppet's Christmas Carol*, and why it has become a pervasive part of our culture – because it's such a timeless work.

#### **Can you explain the concept behind this production?**

This production is set in contemporary Melbourne and that was the commission brief that was given to the librettist, Anna Goldsworthy and composer Graeme Koehne so their text has already set this in contemporary Melbourne. Often as a director it might be my choice to set it in contemporary Melbourne, but that's already been dictated as part of the work itself. In a way, for me that was quite easy because now all I have to do is take what they've done and put it on stage. I don't have to be too clever about it, I don't have to try and create a concept because the concept has already been developed for me. What my job then becomes is to tell that story in the clearest way possible.

#### **What are some of the themes you'll explore in this opera?**

Obviously, Christmas. Christmas is a strong theme in this show. We look quite broadly at a lot of modern-day social issues and again it's not stuff that I have had to necessarily try and squeeze the production to reflect, but rather these issues are things that Anna has beautifully written into the libretto. We do touch on things like poverty, we do touch on charity and what charity means. There are strong themes of capitalism, consumerism and materialism and the limits of those in providing happiness for people. This is all in the context of at Christmas time, but they speak more broadly to the human experience which I think is very beautiful. On that note, I can't remember who said it, but there's a wisdom in theatre that there is the universal in the specific. So, by being specific about these themes at Christmas time – which is a time we traditionally associate with family, community, gathering together, celebration and generosity – by looking at these themes in that specific context, we're talking more broadly to the human experience, to life and how we live in relation to other people in general. I think that's something that is quite beautiful that *A Christmas Carol* allows us to explore even though it's at Christmas time. It's not really about Christmas but it's set at Christmas time.

We also explore themes of loneliness, themes of I suppose shame and self-depravation, that's a big one. If we think about the character of Scrooge, why is he like this? What has made him want to stay away from people? What has made him not want to give or receive any form of generosity? And that's spiritual generosity, that's material generosity, that's all kinds of generosity. Friendship is generosity. What is it that's made Scrooge want to deprive himself of human contact and love?

#### **You mentioned Anna's woven in some great Melbourne characteristics. How has this adaptation captured Melbourne's community? Are there specific things in it that people will recognise?**

Yes, there are. We haven't directly quoted anything in Melbourne visually, but you will notice little mentions of certain places like Fed [Federation] Square and Bourke Street Mall in the libretto. We've drawn some heavy inspiration from places around Melbourne. I think one of the most iconic and visually recognisable places that we've referenced is Pelegrinni's, but in this production this is Fezzoli's Italian deli. If you've ever been to the Mediterranean Wholesalers on Sydney Road or any of those restaurants along Lygon Street, that sort of cultural illusion is quite recognisable.

We also reference Melbourne architecture and different kind of buildings but again, we don't speak to anything specifically, so you won't necessarily see Flinders Street Station for example. But we do have a scene that winds its way around Fed Square and St Paul's Cathedral. If you've been to those places around Christmas time, or Queen Victoria Market is another one, you might go, "Oh that's right, that's got to be Queen Vic Market", but it won't say Queen Vic Market.

**As the director, what type of preparation do you undertake before rehearsals begin?**

Great question. I started by reading the Charles Dickens and getting a feel for the original, but I only read that a few times and then I left that aside because it's not my job to put the Charles Dickens on stage. What I need to do is make sure that I'm really getting into the heart of what Anna and Graeme have written. Because this is a new commission, this was being written in real time as I was preparing for it (the orchestration is still being done). I started by reading the original and then got Anna's libretto through and saw several drafts of that and watched that evolve into the final piece. I was part of the discussions between Anna and Graeme as we looked at how this would all fit together on stage, so it was really collaborative and really lucky for me to be on the wall I suppose in those conversations between Anna and Graeme.

Anna wrote her beautiful libretto and then I studied a lot of that, thought about the characters and their motivations. But I don't want to do too much of that because that doesn't leave any space for the performers to come to their interpretations of the characters in the room. I think it's about creating a balance because we do all of the set design in advance, we do all of the costume design in advance, so we need to have at least certain aspects of people's personalities and the themes of the show really pinned down. But enough that leaves space for the performer to bring their character to life.

Then, also receiving Graeme's music in bits and bobs. It's funny because I imagine how something might go in my head and then I hear it from Graeme and it's completely different and much better than I could have imagined. It's been quite beautiful to be part of the creation process and be reacting to each of these elements as they come through.

I think a lot of the preparation I've done is really just reacting to the information that comes to me. For instance, Graeme hadn't written the third spirit (the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come) until quite recently and we'd already done the costume and set design for all of the ghosts for the whole show. Then the music came through and it was completely different to what I had imagined. I imagined it as begin quite creepy and dark and it came through and it was radiant and beautiful and just so lush and that completely changed everything that we had done. So now we've had to go back to the drawing board to recreate not only the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, but also the Ghost of Christmas Past because they are partner ghosts in a way, and the ghosts have to have a throughline and an arc to them even though they're separate characters. They're all connected. Thinking dramaturgically about the implications of that music change has completely shifted the whole show. A lot of that stuff is what I've been doing as the work has come through.

**Does the sound of the music influence decisions that you make around direction and if so, how?**

Absolutely. I would say that it's in many ways the main driver of the direction. The music illustrates a whole lot of different things in opera. It illustrates the inner feelings of the characters that they don't tell us; it illustrates the feelings that they do tell us and provides emotional backing or emotional weight to things that they say or do; it also illustrates the world that we're in. Part of working with the music is working out which bit is referring to what and going, "Oh, is this what the feel of the world is or is this what the character is thinking, here? And is this what the character is telling us or is this what the character is not telling us but is thinking or feeling?"

That's just thinking about the composition in general, but then there's also the orchestration. I've been working from a vocal score which is just piano and singing until recently when we had some of the orchestral score come through. The light and shade that is in the orchestral score is amazing. Before the orchestral score comes in it's like I've got this outline or drawing and then the orchestral score comes through, and I can really colour it based on what Graeme's written.

The thing about working with music is that you decide whether you want to go with it or against it. You can use it to highlight the opposite of something really beautifully or you can use it to provide the emotional backing. This is in flux all the time so there's no one way to do it. In fact, if you go with the music all the time, it's quite boring and predictable but you can switch it up and play against it based on what the most appropriate thing dramatically at the time is, using that music as a guide. That's how I work with music.

**When studying drama, students are taught to develop their skills around the elements of drama, dramatic meaning and dramatic action. How do you incorporate these elements into a professional setting? Do you make active decisions about these elements or are they addressed naturally in the rehearsal process?**



I think all of these elements are related and they all feed into one another. The idea for me as a director is to always be as clear as possible in the storytelling. The story comes first, and the themes will always arise from the storytelling. The way that we tell the story in the clearest way is by thinking about these elements of drama. Obviously, you do a lot of character work, I do a lot of character analysis, we do a lot of character analysis in the room with the cast, and we think about using voice and movement to create those characters. Part of that analysis is looking at the language that those characters use because people don't speak the same: why do they say this word instead of that word? What different meaning does that have? What information might that give us about who they are or where they've come from or how they're feeling at a particular time or what they want? There's a lot of analysis involved but I like to not spend too much time on analysis and rather we integrate it into the rehearsal. So, we might be rehearsing a little bit and then a question will come up and we talk about that question at the time. So not heaps of time around the desk talking and reading, but you know a little bit of that at the start, and then answering these questions and developing that character as we go along.

An interesting point in this production is that we have a small cast of principal performers playing multiple characters. If we think about how we create those different characters, voice might come into it but that's more limited in an operatic setting because how you say a line is largely restricted by the music and notes that you have to sing and there's not so much room for changing that. But movement is a really important part of creating different characters. In the rehearsal room we'll be doing a lot of movement work and finding each different characters' physicality and playing with how we switch convincingly between these. It's very much about keeping the performers flexible and enabling them to switch from one thing to the next really seamlessly. That takes a lot of preparation for movement in a general context, so we'll do a lot of general movement work, and then we'll look at how we integrate that into the character and probably moving back and forth between those two. That's going to be a big thing in this production.

Space and time are also really important in this show because we go back in time, and we go forward in time. Even the present isn't quite in the present, it's almost in the present, but it's actually slightly in the future. I think that also links into how we delineate space because space can help us tell the time. When we go back in time for example, we don't go, "Oh, we're just back in time", we think specifically about what year it is. Where are we specifically? For example, in one scene we go to country Victoria, and we have a specific year that we go back to, and that specific year is not told to the audience but we as the creative team know exactly what year it is. Our costumes are created accordingly, and our visual references fit into that year as well. We also decide what time of day it is. For our country Victoria scene, it's first thing in the morning on Christmas day. So, the light is going to be a different quality to later in the day, there's that energy of Christmas morning when all the kids get up to check their presents and wait for mum and dad to get up so they can see what Santa's left, and there's that excitement in the air. All these little things help us know what time it is and what space we're in. That's a really big challenge on this show because we have something crazy like twenty different spaces in different times to create. We have to be really specific about these elements so that as the audience we know exactly what's going on, we don't lose track of time and we know where we are in the story.

That helps us create the mood and atmosphere as well and that then is underpinned by Graeme's music, so music will do so much of mood and atmosphere for you. Plus, what we spoke about before, deciding to go with the music or against it or how we use that visually.

**You began your studies as an opera singer. How did you get into singing and ultimately directing?**

I got into singing because I got a role in the school musical, and I didn't know how to sing. I'd always sung in the choir at school, so I knew how to sing but I didn't know how to sing. I'd never had a lesson before, so I sang without knowing how, I suppose. But I did read music, I played piano since I was five and I played the trumpet, and I played the clarinet. So, I got this role in the school musical and decided to learn from the teacher at school because it was convenient. I heard her practicing one day, she was an opera singer, and I don't know but I must have a thing for loud instruments having played the trumpet, but I was like, "That is so loud and so cool. Can you teach me to sing like that?" Then as we started looking more into classical repertoire, I realised it was a combination of things that I really loved. Opera is music theatre but old and it has become its own thing as time has gone on and music theatre branched off. But it's a theatrical piece and I loved acting so that was exciting to me, that I could sing in this way which was actually more suited to my voice than music theatre, and I could act. I also loved languages and I studied French and Italian at school and discovered that opera is in French, Italian and German. I discovered it was a combination of things that I already loved and was interested in. That's how I got into singing and then I studied that at university and then worked professionally for a little while.

I got into directing because I found that I wanted to have more of an engagement with the whole of a work rather than just one role. I side-stepped from singing into writing because I'd always written as well, I did a lot of writing at university so I knew that I could write. I thought I'd write a little opera, so I did that and then from there got more interested in the directing side of things and studied that ultimately in London and now I'm a director.

**Do you think having that performance experience allows you as a director to connect with the singers differently in the rehearsal room?**

Absolutely. I think knowing what singers go through when they're in a performance is a really valuable asset. Knowing how singers are trained is really informative; it's really different to how actors are trained because singers have to learn languages and singers have to learn music and how to sing technically, all of that as well as learning acting. That's predominantly my job in the room, working with them on the action. Also, knowing how restrictions of vocal technique play into what they do and don't feel comfortable with on stage.

Sometimes I think it's useful to have a knowledge of the technical side of singing as well because there's a strong psychological element as well as a strong physical element to singing. Sometimes, for example, if someone is singing a little bit flat it can be, and not in all circumstances, but it can sometimes be a breath flow issue and sometimes giving someone something energetic to do in that moment can help them fix their tuning without ever having to mention tuning. Sometimes if you mention tuning to a singer, they might get in their head about it and start thinking about it which can make it worse. Also, there's just knowing what singers can and can't do and what you can reasonably expect to ask of somebody in that situation. There's also a lot of costume considerations as singers need to breathe. Actors need to breathe too but singers need to breathe differently.



## Activities

### For years 7-8

#### Activity one: Interview with the director

Read the interview with the director of *A Christmas Carol*, Emma Muir-Smith provided on pages 19-22 of this resource and write out answers to the following questions:

1. What are some of the themes of this work?
2. How is this adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* relevant to a Melbourne audience?
3. Explain the work Emma does before rehearsals begin?
4. What does the orchestral score bring to a production and how does it aid Emma in directing the performance?
5. How does space and time play a role in *A Christmas Carol* and how is this addressed in Victorian Opera's production?

### For Year 9-10

#### Activity two: Character monologue

Read the synopsis of *A Christmas Carol* found on pages 4-5 of this resource and choose one of the characters and corresponding situations listed below.

Then, prepare a five-minute monologue in which the character you've chosen is responding to the situation physically and emotionally. Think about how you will use elements like voice, movement, focus, tension, space, language, audience, mood and atmosphere to enhance your monologue.

Finally, perform your monologue for your classmates.

- Scrooge – Just seen the way people have reacted to his death.
- Bob Cratchit – Arrived home from the hospital with Tiny Tim.
- Freda – Scrooge has just kicked her out of his office and was very rude and dismissive of her.
- The Ghost of Jacob Marley – Noticed his long chain for the first time.

Students can also read Dickens' original novella in addition to the synopsis provided in this resource and prepare a monologue to the corresponding situation (or character in regards to Freda).

A copy of the novella can be [found online](#).

### For Years 7-10

#### Activity three: Post-performance analysis

Read the interview with director Emma Muir-Smith, found on pages 19-22 of this resource, then watch the performance of Victorian Opera's *A Christmas Carol*.

After watching the performance, divide your class into six groups and ask them each to discuss one of the points below. Come together as a class at the end and have each group present their thoughts to the rest of room.

- Do you think the transition between characters for those singers playing more than one was a smooth one?
- Were you able to follow the action with the continuous shift backwards and forwards in time? Describe how you felt this was or was not achieved in this production.
- Which singer did you find most convincing or captivating in their role and what was it about their performance that made it so?
- How were the themes that Emma mentioned in her interview portrayed on stage?
- Did the music enhance or distract you from the story?
- As an audience member, how were you engaged by the action on stage?

## For years 11 and 12

### Activity four: Stage a scene from the work

Divide the class into groups of three and have each group assign their members to one of the below roles:

1. Director
2. Ebenezer Scrooge
3. Big Issue Vendor / Charity Collector / Junkie / Marley

Using the excerpt of Anna Goldsworthy's libretto found in Appendix A on pages 32-35 of this resource, stage, rehearse and perform your own version of the scene.

Read the interview with director Emma Muir-Smith (found on pages 19-22) to consider how best to prepare the third role, which plays three different characters.

As each group's interpretation will be a spoken-word version instead of an sung one, students should be encouraged to think creatively around the chorus section at the end of the excerpt and are invited to incorporate music into their performance where desired.

If time allows, each group can approach their design classmates to develop any set, prop, costume or lighting designs in their performance of this excerpt.

This activity can be run over a number of weeks and should conclude with group performance to the class or year level.

### Activity five: Post-performance analysis

Watch a performance of Victorian Opera's *A Christmas Carol* and then write a 1,000 word essay that analyses the below points:

1. Describe the performance and what you liked and disliked about it.
2. Discuss the cohesion of the libretto and the music (both vocal and orchestral) and how these elements were affected by the acting/direction, both positively and negatively.
3. Consider the set and costume design and how it added or detracted from the overall production.
4. Discuss the audience's response to the work, considering how the elements of theatre composition were used to engage the audience.

## The Arts – Visual Arts & Design

### The role of the designers

The **set designer** designs the scenery for the production. For smaller operas, the designer might devise a clever way to adapt one main set piece to convey the different scenes of an opera, while for large-scale operas, they may design a different set piece for each act. When designing the set, set designers need to take into account passages of time within the story and how practical and safe it is for the singers and actors using it.

The **costume designer** is responsible for designing the clothes or costumes singers wear on stage throughout a performance. This includes designing concepts for ready-made styles and drawing designs for original creations. Not only do they need to consider how the costumes correspond to the set and lighting designs, but also the actions the singers will need to perform on stage within their role, and how their costume might affect their ability to sing to their full capacity.

In theatre and opera, the **lighting designer** is responsible for creating the lighting, atmosphere and time of day around the action taking place on stage. The lighting design can completely alter the way an opera looks, regardless of the set and costume designs.

The **wardrobe supervisor** oversees the costume department and works together with the designer to bring the costumes to life. They will source fabrics to use when costumes need to be created from scratch, source hats, shoes and any other accessories from their list of suppliers and oversee costume fittings throughout the creation process.

All the designers mentioned above work closely together, but most importantly with the director to ensure that the world they're creating aligns across the company. Depending on the size of the production, the conceptual design part of the process can begin two years before an opera is staged! This goes to show how much planning is required before an opera is ready to begin rehearsals, let alone be performed.



### Interview with costume designer, Bridget Milesi and set designer, Claudia Mirabello

**Were either of you familiar with Charles Dickens' novella *A Christmas Carol* before being asked to design the costumes and set?**

**Bridget:** Yes, absolutely! It was one of my favourite stories as a kid, and I've seen most of the film versions. I also loved *The Muppets Christmas Carol* (and tried not to let too much of Jim Henson's influence creep into this project).

**Claudia:** Not really to be honest. I don't think I've ever seen a version of *A Christmas Carol*. I think I've read one Dickens before, and it wasn't my favourite thing in the world. But I did read this obviously before designing it and I did love the novella, it's really lovely. But I hadn't interacted with much media around it when I was growing up. I think Bridget had a lot more interactions with it than I did, with the Muppets, but I was never a Muppets kid.

**Can you describe the design concept for this production of *A Christmas Carol*?**

**Bridget:** Modern Melbourne Christmas with elements/nods to the classic Dickensian era and story. It was an interesting challenge to translate the original story into a more familiar Melbourne setting.

**Claudia:** It's very playful. We're very much leaning into it being a family friendly show and Emma is definitely leaning into the comedy that's in the libretto and drawing out some of the funnier and more wonderful aspects of it and not just dwelling on the sad stuff, which is really lovely. There are elements of Dickensian in it but they're only really in costume nowadays. The set is very much Melbourne in the present or obviously because it goes back in time, back and forth, we're look at 1980's Italian delis and iconically Melbourne spaces to bring to the stage.

**What are some of those Dickensian elements you mentioned? Can you describe them?**

**Claudia:** There's not really many in the set anymore. There was at our initial stages of designing and they've all been reduced to nothing. But then I think most of those in the costumes were reduced down so there's not really much Dickensian anymore. I think we drew on it when we were designing and then it's been whittled out to embrace the Melbourne element because the libretto is written in a very modern style. It's very modern and we leant into it being based in the now and recognisable. The homage to the original is more in the characters and the story rather than anything visual.

**As you just mentioned, this story jumps forwards and backwards in time quite a bit. What's involved in ensuring your designs delineate the differences in time clearly enough so that audiences can follow the storyline?**

**Bridget:** By making the costume designs consistent with a particular setting for each time period, i.e., the culture of Melbourne's Italian community in the 1980's or Collins Street's corporate men in the 1990's.

**Claudia:** As Bridget said, mainly costume, because there are twenty-three different scenes or settings across the show. It's trying to pull a lot of weight in terms of recognising that and showing that without getting into too much of the time other than the spaces we're creating being visually recognisable, like the deli being in the 80's and the aesthetic of that. But also, I think I feel like a lot of spaces like that still look like that now, so it is a little bit difficult in that area. We go to country Victoria, and again, country Victoria on stage is difficult to portray, so it really is a lot of the costume doing the hard work in terms of telling the time and setting.

**Bridget, a number of the principal cast perform different roles in this production. Is this something you have to take into account when you're designing the costumes?**

**Bridget:** Yes, this was a major consideration as I was designing the costumes. I had to pay close attention to the timings required for the costume changes and ensure the changes would be manageable backstage.

**What sort of research do you do to inform your designs?**

**Bridget:** Once we'd agreed on the settings and scenes and discussed some character backgrounds, we did research into the different contexts required for the design. For instance, a 1980's Victorian Australian nurse uniform. A trip to Collins Street to people watch was great for researching Scrooge's corporate character.

**Claudia:** For this I tried not to look too much at the original or other versions of Dickens partially because this is so different to a lot of them because it is a new opera, it's a new take on it. I don't believe there's ever been a *Christmas Carol* set in Melbourne before, it's very new. So, I didn't really look at any original other than reading the original text to get an idea from that.

I do a lot of visual research, mainly from books and online but also, it's very much informed by Emma, the director and what her initial ideas are. It's been quite a long design process for me, it's been going for about four months and things are still shifting a little bit, not a lot but there are still things to be confirmed as we've gone back and forth because it was just a pretty big feat to get so many places on stage, seamlessly, ideally. The research is kind of visual but also visual with her [Emma] in terms of sitting down and looking at things and looking at what we both like and what works to both of our eyes in terms of making a space accessible for all the areas we go for.

**I guess that might even change during the rehearsal process when put things into practice.**

**Claudia:** Yeah, definitely. I put forward some plans the other day of scene-by-scene breakdowns, so where all the set pieces are on the stage in any given scene. Because there are so many (there's twenty-three of these plans), there's a little note on all of them that says, "This is subject to change in rehearsals. This is an idea that we talked about". It's likely that once Emma gets in the room with them and with people and bodies that she'll go, "Actually it needs to be further back or further forward, or we actually want to have this in or that in".

Similarly, we have a number of flying elements in the show partially as a way to help the scene changes be more accessible and less clunky because it brings things in and out a bit easier. But even that I'm like, "These placements are all subject to change", because it depends a lot on our lighting designer, Richard [Vabre]. We have to coordinate it a bit because I don't want to block any space that he needs with lights, and he doesn't want to block the flying elements so we have to negotiate our spaces. Everything's a little like, "Rehearsals may change but this is the general idea of where we're at".

**What do your roles entail once the designs are approved and are being made or built?**

**Bridget:** This project has been a first for me, as before I'd heard about the opportunity, I had already made plans to move overseas. I completed the costume design work before jetting off, handing over the costume designs to the capable hands of Claudia and briefed our head of wardrobe, Mel Serjeant.

**Claudia:** It's really overseeing it and making sure that what's being built is going to be functional and correct from what we proposed (from the plans and the model) and being like, "Yeah this is great or actually that colour needs to change or this one might need to be on wheels". But ideally, I've given them enough information that everything should be ok. It's going to be a lot of being in the rehearsal room and being at Victorian Opera in person because then I can make sure that from the rehearsal if anything does shift in there it's accounted for in the set and also in the costumes because Bridget has now jetted off to Italy. I'm overseeing all of them coming to fruition, so it's all the fittings for that, making sure that everything looks the way it needs to look.



Also props, being in the rehearsal room is really great for prop and prop accountability because I believe at Victorian Opera it's usually stage managers who do a lot of the sourcing as well as me and it's a lot easier to communicate because we're around each other.

Then after the rehearsal period and fittings and making and everything, it's the theatre and it's tech week and it's bumping it all in and tech'ing the whole show. It's fun and tiring!

**Do you have any designers that influence your work? If so, why and in what way?**

**Bridget:** I'm usually drawn to works with a colourful and playful aesthetic. I'm also in love with vintage design and art particularly the early 1980's.

**Claudia:** Maybe not specifically designers but artists do usually influence my work. Rather than influence I'd say I work a lot with a designer as her assistant a bit so I think my practice is influenced by her practice. Maybe not so much aesthetically. That's kind of really wonderful to learn from someone who is experienced and wonderful at their job. So, I assist her a bit and that's wonderful learning and informs practice but not so much aesthetics. I tend to work to each show and what it requires from, not only the text or the libretto or whatever it is, but from the director and whoever I'm creating it with, the other designers, and responding to them. I don't know that I have necessarily one aesthetic, it's very fluid and fluctuating which is quite fun. There are things that I visually know when I look at them that I go, "Oh, that doesn't work", or "I don't like that", but generally I think I'm quite fluid when it comes to aesthetics and try to draw on different areas of history and art to inform it rather than one specific thing I'm interested in all the time.

**I guess then that it means that all your designs are different as well.**

**Claudia:** I think if you probably looked at them all there is an aesthetic similarity across them because it's still me. That's what I find aesthetically, in most cases, pleasing and in some cases not for a reason. You can see personal aesthetics in there, but I think overall I really try and collaborate with who I'm working with and what it actually requires. I think I definitely lean away from naturalism a lot of the time but in saying that there have been some instances where I've done work where it suits the show, so it just is being free to adjust. It's important to me.

**How did you each get into design?**

**Bridget:** I've always been into art and craft in some shape or form. A trip to the Edinburgh Fringe in 2015 to make costumes and props for my brother's comedy show made me realise I wanted to pursue the VCA [Victorian College of the Arts] production design course. I graduated from there in 2018 and have loved my design roles ever since.

**Claudia:** When I was leaving high school, I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do. I've been sewing since I was about five or six. I thought maybe I wanted to go into costume manufacturing and so I applied for a couple of degrees around that and one of the ones was VCA. But the degree I applied for was their production degree where I did set and costume design and then also manufacturing for both. I thought it sounded really great and really interesting, and I got in, very luckily. Then within a month or two of being there, I was like, "I don't want to make costumes. I want to design, plan them and make spaces and design scenography and that more wonderful stuff to my brain". I think there's such skill in the making and the construction, but I find the designing really stimulating in a different way.

**Do you find having the ability to build and construct helps in the way you design?**

**Claudia:** I think so definitely. I think I'm really lucky that the degree covered all those areas to a degree. It wasn't in depth in everything, but it was a good baseline for a lot of it. I do find that it's definitely useful to have the knowledge about construction because it helps to put together plans or when you're thinking about a space, reasonably how much work goes into this, can it be functional for touring, can it pack down? All those questions around functionality are a lot easier rather than just the creative side of it. I got a reasonably practical brain, so I think I find it quite useful in that way as well.

Then with costume, I think that's something that comes reasonably natural for me. I've been around it for a while so working out things like construction and technique and design lines, I know how long things are going to take. Maybe not the exact length because someone else making it is not the same as me making it, but I have an indication of how much work goes into costumes and set which makes it easier.

**What advice do you have for anyone interested in pursuing a career in design?**

**Bridget:** Take on projects you're passionate about, keep practicing your craft and keep in touch with people you love working with... and be kind!

**Claudia:** It's very fun, a bit stressful but very fun. I thought Bridget's answer was really lovely for this question. Being kind is very important. Find people you love to work with and continuing that relationship and working on that I think is really wonderful and one of the best parts of working in theatre and design. Having these strong collaborations that feel really gratifying and really supportive and really wonderful. So I'd say, find who you like to work with.

If you want to, study, if you don't want to, you don't have to, but I'd say it's very useful in terms of getting a baseline for what's required of you once you actually get jobs like this.



## Costume design renderings





## Activities

### For Years 7-8

#### Activity one: Examining the different adaptations of Scrooge

Do some research to examine how the character of Scrooge has been portrayed visually across different adaptations of the work overtime. Pick your favourite three and write a few paragraphs to accompany each that considers the following points:

- A brief description of the adaptation it's from, i.e., is it a book or a spoken/music theatre production or movie.
- Describe the setting, i.e., Victorian England, contemporary America and describe the aesthetic used throughout the adaptation.
- Describe the design of the character's costume, including the materials used.
- Consider the designers' intentions and how the costume represents the character's personality. Does it meet audience expectation?

Finally, read the synopsis of Victorian Opera's *A Christmas Carol* found on pages 4-5 of this resource then draw your own version of Scrooge.

#### Activity two: Getting to know Australian designers

Research three different Australian costume and/or set designers and write down five points about each of them which identify and describe their design styles and influences.

Then, complete a design for each of the different spirits in *A Christmas Carol*, drawing influence from the designers you researched, incorporating it with your own style.

### For Years 9-10

#### Activity three: Representing themes visually

Read the interview with the director, Emma Muir-Smith, provided on pages 19-22 of this resource and write a list of the themes she mentions are present in this work.

Then, do some research and find a variety of visual references that you think best represents these themes in our society today.

Present your chosen pieces to the class in a presentation that:

- Explains why you chose them.
- Explores how the artist has depicted the theme from your point of view as the viewer.
- Identifies the technical elements used, both in your viewing of the work as well as from what you discover when researching the background of each work.

#### Activity four: Interpreting themes through design

Pick one of the themes in *A Christmas Carol* and create two designs that represent them in contemporary society.

You can use any materials, media and techniques in your designs. You must also write a paragraph or two that outlines the inspiration behind each design and what they are made from.

Finally, think about how you want to present your design series in a public viewing considering what and/or how you want the audience to experience your work.

*\*This activity can be completely over a term.*



## For years 11-12

### Activity five: Costume design

A description of each ghost and spirit that Scrooge encounters in *A Christmas Carol* is provided below.

Use these descriptions to design and make a costume for each character, using any materials, media and techniques at your disposal.

Finally, organise a public viewing for your school community and consider how they will be displayed.

#### The Ghost of Jacob Marley

*Ghost of Marley appears in room, drawing a long chain that winds around him like a tail: it is made of mobile phones, tablets, laptop computers, briefcases, cash-boxes, express post envelopes, spreadsheets, keys, padlocks etc. His body is transparent. Death-cold eyes; a bandage around its head and chin.*

*The Ghost of Marley raises a frightful cry, and shakes its chain with a dismal and appalling noise. He then removes the bandage from round its head, as if it were too warm to wear indoors, and its lower jaw drops down upon its breast.*

#### The Ghost of Christmas Past

*Light flashes up in the room and Scrooge finds himself face to face with an unearthly visitor.*

*Scrooge struggles with the ghost and seizes the extinguisher-cap, and by a sudden action presses it down upon its head. Though Scrooge presses it down with all his force, he cannot hide the light: which streams from under it, in an unbroken flood upon the ground. Scrooge finds himself in his own bedroom, gives the cap a parting squeeze, and falls into bed.*

#### The Ghost of Christmas Present

*A jolly Giant is posing with his surfboard. He is clothed in a Santa hat and Santa robe, bordered with white fur, which hangs loosely, exposing his chest and board shorts/wetsuit. He has bare feet, and wears a holly wreath on his head, set with shining icicles. His blond curls are long and free.*

#### The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come

*The Phantom slowly, gravely, silently, approaches, and Scrooge falls upon his knees. It is shrouded in a deep black garment, which conceals everything except one outstretched hand. It seems to scatter gloom and mystery, and is difficult to separate from the darkness, but seems to be tall and stately.*

*\*This activity can be completely over a term.*

### Activity six: Set design

Read the excerpt from the libretto provided in Appendix A on pages 32-35 of the resource.

Then, design the set for this excerpt and create a set model box to display it in a presentation to your classmates. Be sure to build any moving parts, such as flown set pieces and distinctive props, to include in your set model box.

Finally, present your design to your class and explain what inspiration you took from the libretto in your design and the research you undertook to inform and complete your design.

*\*This activity can be completely over a term.*

## Appendix B

*Scrooge leaves office with a growl.*

*Orchestral interlude: Festive Melbourne: Christmas carol music punctuated by Scrooge's exclamations: 'Bah humbug!' Salvation Army Bands. Sugarplum Fairy and Myer Christmas windows. Christmas lights in Fed Square. Carols by Candlelight. Queen Victoria markets. Noise of Christmas drinks and traffic and purchases being made.*

BIG ISSUE VENDOR      Get your Big Issue Bumper Christmas Edition!

SCROOGE      What? – from a salesman in your condition?  
Bah humbug!

CHARITY COLLECTOR      Donate to the Salvation Army!  
Amnesty international! Greenpeace! Saint Vincent de Paul!

SCROOGE      Bah humbug! Bah humbug! Bah humbug!

CHARITY COLLECTOR      Would you care to donate to medical research?

SCROOGE      Better the sickly just fall off their perch!

CHARITY COLLECTOR      But your kind donation could be their salvation!

SCROOGE      Let them die and reduce our population!  
Bah humbug!

*Salvation army band approaches with 'God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen'*

SCROOGE      God rest ye merry gentlemen  
there's so much to despise:  
the weak and the woke, the morally vain,  
their virtue-signalling cries.  
So save me from all do-gooders  
as I go on my way.  
I say Bah humbug! Christmas brings no joy  
Brings me no joy  
I say Bah humbug! Christmas brings no joy.

On Swanston Street, in Burke Street Mall  
Another cause is born:  
To save the world from poverty  
Upon this dreadful morn  
Help poor and sick and lazy and weak!  
Free enterprise they scorn.  
I say Bah humbug! Christmas is a fraud,  
socialist fraud,  
I say Bah humbug Christmas is a fraud.  
to Christmas bah-humbug I say!

JUNKIE      Got a smoke?

SCROOGE      I hope you choke!

*Scrooge arrives home and takes out key. Intercom transforms to Marley's face. Hair stirs but wide-open eyes are motionless. Then it turns back to intercom. Scrooge opens door, walks in, and switches on lamp. Looks back at door before he shuts it.*

SCROOGE      Humbug!



*Scrooge slams door with bang, sending thunder through house, with peals of echoes. As he trudges upstairs, he thinks he sees a black hearse drive past. Shrugs his shoulders, but checks rooms of house, under the table and sofa, under the bed, in the closet. Satisfied, he locks himself in bedroom, changes into pyjamas, and turns on television. Face of Marley comes up.*

SCROOGE                      Bah humbug!

*Scrooge stands up and walks around. Suddenly his radio comes on, and phone alarm, and car alarm, and all the electronic noises of the house start sounding (Google Home/washing machine chimes/microwave/fridge/dishwasher/mobile ringtones/'You have new mail'.) Then they stop, and a clanking noise begins downstairs. Booms from cellar, then louder on the floors below; then coming up the stairs; then coming straight towards his door.*

SCROOGE                      It's humbug still!  
I won't believe it.

*Ghost of Marley appears in room, drawing a long chain that winds around him like a tail: it is made of mobile phones, tablets, laptop computers, briefcases, cash-boxes, express post envelopes, spreadsheets, keys, padlocks etc. His body is transparent. Death-cold eyes; a bandage around its head and chin.*

SCROOGE                      What now?  
What do you want with me?

MARLEY                      Much!

SCROOGE                      Who are you?

MARLEY                      Rather ask me who I was.

SCROOGE                      Who were you then?

MARLEY                      In life I was your business partner, Jacob Marley.

SCROOGE                      Can you, can you sit down?

MARLEY                      I can.

SCROOGE                      Well do it then!

MARLEY                      You don't believe in me.

SCROOGE                      I don't.

MARLEY                      Why do you doubt your senses?

SCROOGE                      *(with bravado)*  
Because a little thing affects them:  
My upset stomach makes them cheats.  
You could be undigested cheese or rancid meat.

*The Ghost of Marley raises a frightful cry, and shakes its chain with a dismal and appalling noise. He then removes the bandage from round its head, as if it were too warm to wear indoors, and its lower jaw drops down upon its breast.*

SCROOGE                      Okay! Okay! I believe in you.  
Quite outstanding special effects.

MARLEY                      I could have made others happy  
but chose not to. Woe is me!

*Again the spectre raises a frightful cry, and shakes its chain and wrings its shadowy hands.*

SCROOGE                      You are clearly in a lot of pain.  
Why do you drag this heavy chain, this heavy chain?

*Chain song*

MARLEY I wear the chain I forged in life  
 I made it link by link,  
 I made it of my own free will  
 I'm haunted by its clink clink clank!

Does this chain look strange to you?  
 You seem disturbed by it.  
 I made it of my own free will.  
 Of my free will I wore it.

*Scrooge trembles.*

SCROOGE It might well be my tummy trouble  
 But I'm still feeling distinctly uncomfortable.

MARLEY Oh comfort I have none to give,  
 nor can I tell you what I would.  
 I cannot rest, I cannot stay.  
 I only wish I'd understood!

I lived for profit at any cost,  
 greed was my only course.  
 Now weary journeys lie ahead,  
 and tortures of remorse!

SCROOGE Oh come on, Jacob.  
 You were always a good man of business.

MARLEY Business!  
 Humanity was my business!  
 The common good was my business!  
 The dealings of trade were a drop of water  
 In the ocean of my true business!

Oh why did I walk past my fellow human beings  
 with eyes cast down to the ground?  
 When I could have raised them to the light?  
 Hear me! – before I'm gone!

SCROOGE I'm listening. Trust me, I am all ears.  
 Have you been dragging this chain  
 for seven long years?

MARLEY *(nods grimly)*  
 Do you know the weight and length  
 Of chain that you are carrying?  
 It is as long and more,  
 As heavy and as harrowing.

So after I died you laboured hard  
 And made ill-gotten gains,  
 So soon you'll drag from day to day  
 An even heavier chain!

SCROOGE                      Jacob, you're scaring me.  
                                  I'm starting to wish you were still buried.

MARLEY                     My appearance tonight is a serious warning  
                                  but there is a chance of escape.  
                                  I've procured a single prospect for you  
                                  to avoid my terrible fate.

SCROOGE                    You were always a good friend to me.  
                                  [But I need an acid-eze, or peppermint tea.]

MARLEY                    You will be haunted by three spirits: One, Two and Three.  
                                  Without their visits, the path I tread  
                                  you cannot hope to shun.  
                                  Expect the first tomorrow morning  
                                  when the bell tolls One.  
                                  Expect the second the following night  
                                  at exactly the very same time.  
                                  Expect the third the night after beyond that  
                                  as the stroke of midnight chimes.

                                 You will not see me again my friend  
                                  this warning is my last!  
                                  Just make sure, for the sake of your soul,  
                                  you remember what has passed!

*Marley's Ghost takes its wrapper from the table, and binds it round its head, bringing the jaws together with a smart noise in the teeth. The apparition walks backward, at every step it takes, the window opens a little. It beckons Scrooge to approach, and then holds up its hand, warning him to come no nearer. There are confused noises in the air; a vocalise of lamentation and regret; wailings inexpressibly sorrowful and self-accusatory. The spectre, after listening for a moment, joins in the mournful dirge; and floats out upon the bleak, dark night.*

DISTANT CHORUS            We wear the chain we forged in life,  
                                  we made it link by link,  
                                  we made it of our own free will,  
                                  we're haunted by its clink!

*Scrooge follows to window: the air is filled with phantoms, moaning and wandering in restless haste, each wearing chains, some linked together. They fade into mist, and the night becomes normal. Scrooge closes the window, examines the which remains bolted.*

SCROOGE                    Bah! Hum....

*Scrooge climbs into bed and falls asleep.*

*Ghost chorus vocalise continues, disrupted by clanging bells....*



## Glossary

**Act** – A component of the total work, consisting of its own partial dramatic arc.

**Aria** – An elaborate composition for solo voice with instrumental accompaniment.

**Arioso** – A recitative of a lyrical and expressive quality.

**Bar** – Also called a measure. The section between two bar lines containing the number of beats as indicated by the time signature.

**Baritone** – The male voice between the tenor and bass.

**Bass** – The lowest male voice.

**Baton** – A white stick used by conductors to direct the musicians and singers, allowing the conductor greater visibility.

**Beat** – The regular pulse of the music.

**Choreographer** – The person who designs and creates the movement of the performance, usually in dance form.

**Chorus** – In opera or music theatre, this refers to a large body of singers.

**Chorus master** – The person responsible for the rehearsal and preparation of the chorus prior to production.

**Composer** – The person who writes the music.

**Conductor** – The person who interprets, directs and cues the orchestra or musical performance, coordinating the performers and keeping the time through the technique of hand movements.

**Designer** – The person who designs the overall look of the production, including the sets, costume, props and lighting.

**Director** – The person who is in charge of the artistic features of the production.

**Dress rehearsal** – Often the final rehearsal of all the component parts of the production in full costume.

**Duet** – A composition for two performers of equal importance.

**Ensemble** – A group of performers performing together.

**Excerpt** – A short extract from a piece of music.

**Finale** – The last movement of a work that contains more than one movement.

**Harmony** – The chordal (vertical) structure of a musical composition, in contrast to the linear (single melody line) structure.

**Interlude** – A section of music between acts.

**Intermission** – A break in the performance that allows the audience to leave the auditorium.

**Key** – The tonal centre around which a composition is based, often indicated by a key signature.

**Leitmotif** – The representation of characters, typical situations and recurring ideas by musical motifs.

**Libretto** – The text of an opera. In music theatre, the libretto is commonly referred to as 'the book'.

**Lighting designer** – A lighting designer works with the creative team to create the lighting, atmosphere, and time of day for the production in response to the book, while keeping in mind issues of visibility, safety, and cost. They also work closely with the stage manager who will queue the system controller during a performance.

**Mezzo-soprano** – The second highest female voice.

**Mise en scène** – The arrangement of the scenery, props, etc., on the stage of a theatrical production.

**Modes** – In music, any of several ways of ordering the notes of a scale according to the intervals they form with the tonic, which then provides a theoretical framework for the melody.

**Music theatre** – A form of theatrical performance that combines songs, spoken dialogue, acting and dance.

**Opera** – A staged drama set to music, comprised of vocal pieces with instrumental accompaniment and usually with orchestral overtures and interludes.

**Opera buffa** – Also known as ‘comic opera’, an opera with a large mixture of music, a light subject and a happy ending, including comic elements.

**Opera seria** – Also known as ‘serious opera’, an opera with dramatic, serious content, often with a tragic ending.

**Orchestra** – A large ensemble of instruments divided into four main sections: strings, woodwind, brass and percussion.

**Orchestration** – Utilisation of the instrumentation of an orchestra in the writing of a composition.

**Overture** – An instrumental introduction to an opera or other musical theatre work.

**Principal** – One of the main characters.

**Pulse** – The underlying beat of a piece of music.

**Proscenium arch** – The part of a stage in front of the curtain that separates the stage from the auditorium and provides the arch that frames it.

**Range** – The range from the lowest to highest notes that are played or sung.

**Rehearsal** – Where the performers and the director establish and refine the dramatic and musical interpretation of the production.

**Rhythm** – The regular and irregular pattern of notes of different length in the music.

**Repetiteur** – A pianist who works as an accompanist and vocal coach for opera.

**Scale model box** – A scale miniature of the set design made from foam core and card.

**Score** – The document where all the parts of a work, both instrumental and vocal are notated.

**Solo** – A piece of music performed by a single performer either alone or with accompaniment.

**Soprano** – The highest female voice.

**Sound Designer** – The person who designs the additional sound used in a production.

**Stage Manager** – The person who manages the running of rehearsals and performances, managing all the components of the production during performance.

**Surtitles** – A translation of the words being sung on stage, projected onto a screen above the stage.

**Synopsis** – A summary of the story.

**Tempo** – The speed of a composition.

**Tenor** – A high male voice.

**Tessitura** – The general range of vocal parts.

**Time signature** – A notation used to specify how many beats in a bar and the note value equivalent to the beat.

**Tone** – The interval of a major second or a sound of definite pitch and duration.

**Tutti** – A marking in a score that indicates the use of the whole orchestra and/or all the vocal parts.

**Vibrato** – A very slight fluctuation of pitch in rapid succession to create warmth in the sound.

**Vocal range** – The human voice falls into a range from the lowest to highest notes they can reach. The normal range is around two octaves and is traditionally broken into seven voice types from highest to lowest: soprano, mezzo-soprano, contralto, countertenor, tenor, baritone and bass.

**Western music** – A musical tradition derived from European cultures spanning the flourishing musical culture of ancient times to the present day.

**Workshop** – An exploration of a new work (production, text, music, design).

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## Images

1. Image of Charles Dickens. Retrieved from <https://www.publicdomainpictures.net/en/view-image.php?image=76585&picture=charles-dickens-at-writing-desk>.