

VICTORIAN  
**OPERA**



**Annual Report**  
**2020**

## Chair's Message

A year of operatic proportions and one booked at the Palais Theatre, St Kilda. How strikingly different an experience at a venue could prove. Victorian Opera opened its Season 2020 with its critically-acclaimed production of Richard Strauss' *Salome* to the thrilling energy of a boisterous live audience reacting to the savage imagery of a teenage princess kissing a severed head. The year closed with an intimate livestreamed Christmas concert with socially distanced artists and its audience at home.

Aside from this production of Strauss' *Salome*, all remaining productions were incrementally cancelled throughout 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic, lockdown and associated restrictions prohibited our work from making it to the stage.

With its dedicated core staff, and scalable workforce, Victorian Opera's structure has always enabled its agility. This agility served the company extremely well in 2020 as Victorian Opera's staff swiftly adapted to evolving circumstances.

Productions, recitals and events were cancelled, customers were notified and many generously donated their existing tickets to support Victorian Opera's ongoing vitality. This pattern repeated itself throughout the year as more works became impossible to present.

Alongside arts companies and organisations of every kind across the world, we pivoted online fast. Our core staff flexibly offered a range of skills to enable a vast amount of content; adjusting their roles to become illustrators, interviewers, video editors, and camera operators.

Victorian Opera sought to engage audiences of every age with stimulating and varied work online. Children were entertained with a digital interactive songbook *Baby Bilby Sings*, primary students were introduced to opera with our *Access All Areas: Livestream Program* and teens both enjoyed and performed in a range of Victorian Opera's Youth Chorus Ensemble videos.

The company engaged artists for performances *In Recital* and offered them an outlet to share their stories, experiences and performance memories in regular interview series *Artists in Isolation*. We sought to celebrate the craft of Australia's best-loved singers and theatre-makers through every means possible.

Our core workforce were grateful recipients of JobKeeper payments and many elected to financially support struggling artists through

a Pay it Forward program. This program alongside opportunities to perform with the company, and weekly communications to our artistic community were warmly received as Victorian Opera instilled a sense of value and belonging amongst artists and arts workers.

The Covid-19 pandemic presented Victorian Opera with an anomalous year financially with the evaporation of our box office income counter-balanced by attendant savings through the progressive cancellations of productions as the pandemic continued. This financial position helps to insulate Victorian Opera from further unexpected circumstances that may result in restricted audience numbers and snap cancellations.

As Chair of Victorian Opera's Board, I fully acknowledge the unstinting support provided by my fellow Board members to the company throughout 2020. The Board rallied around Victorian Opera and truly rolled up its sleeves to work very closely with management to ensure anything we could possibly do, was done.

Through the unprecedented events of 2020, the Board gratefully acknowledges the support of Australia Council for the Arts, The State Government of Victoria through Creative Victoria, our long-standing Foundation partner the Robert Salzer Foundation, our Trusts and Foundations, Patrons, Corporate Partners, and audiences.

**Genevieve Overell AM**  
Chair, Victorian Opera

## Our Board

**Chair**  
Genevieve Overell AM

**Board of Directors**  
Roger Box  
Vivienne Corcoran  
Richard Kurth  
Siobhan Lenihan  
Selina Lightfoot  
Stephen McIntyre  
Grant Powell  
Patricia Stebbens  
Eduardo Montero (Board Observer)  
Anna Pitt (Board Observer)

## Welcome

To say that 2020 was a difficult year does not do justice to the situation that presented itself in March of that year. The year started with arguably Victorian Opera's most challenging and artistically brilliant production: Richard Strauss' *Salome*, and then we were plunged into lockdown. The immediate decimation of our live performance sector was shocking, devastating and nerve-wracking.

The core team and Board of Victorian Opera took the stance to support our casts, creatives and technicians across the sector. The leadership shown by our Board to maintain our core team at Victorian Opera was welcomed by all. Every week, we hoped that the pandemic would be harnessed, and that we could resume our activities. As it became clearer that this was not to be the case, we took stock and reinvented ourselves along with many across the sector.

As we developed online content, we focussed on engaging arts workers across the sector that were essentially jobless and struggling with basics such as paying their rent. Our team learned new skills including camera operation, sound recording and editing to produce virtual recitals, interviews, and several publications including online books and resource modules. The connection to our community was essential to supporting our wider family and also to help ensure that our sector would be ready to step up when live performance resumed.

It was incredibly heartening to be supported by our patrons in the multitude of ways they chose to engage. Many regularly asked how they could help and offered whatever support may be needed. The feedback on our online content was welcomed and helped us to hone the offering and engage more deeply with our audiences. We listened closely to any feedback and adapted accordingly.

Our final offering in 2020 celebrated the festive season: *And so this is Christmas* was a concert with eight singers, 14 musicians from our performance partner Orchestra Victoria, and four puppeteers from Black Hole Theatre. Originally planned to be performed for the first returned live audience, as the event drew near, it became clear that we would need to present the concert online. This marked our first livestreamed, public performance and became a model for extending our 2021 offering to audiences hesitant to return to the theatre or unable to attend.

Throughout 2020, we planned and reassessed so many projects and to a large degree it resulted in a new model of operation. Not one that replaces live performance, but one that complements it.

Collaboration and consultation across the arts sector was greatly valued and remains in place in 2021. It's clear that as we progress through the aftermath of 2020 and the continuing devastation of the pandemic, we have become more creative, stronger in our focus, and more determined to find ways to work in an evolving environment while still supporting our community.

Thank you to all who took the time to engage with Victorian Opera across 2020, in whatever form that may have been. You gave us the inspiration to keep finding solutions and reimagine the potential of opera and musical theatre for everyone.

**Elizabeth Hill-Cooper**  
CEO, Victorian Opera





## 2020 Artist Engagement

80 artists received  
1,027 hours of coaching across  
211 private rehearsals

## New Australian Opera in Development

Workshop: *Echo and Narcissus / Cassandra*

1 week, 2 new Australian operas, commissioned and written in lockdown

11 artists involved

## University of Melbourne's Atelier Program

Artistic Director Richard Mills and Victorian Opera's music staff coached 17 University students across 15 x 3-hour workshops

## 2020 Overview: Performance

### Salome

22, 25, 27 February, 2020  
Palais Theatre, St Kilda

Total Audience  
**3,925**

Three *Salome* insight talks

“Victorian Opera opens its 2020 season with Richard Strauss’ short, sharp sensation. Directed by Cameron Menzies, this production is perhaps the company’s most impressive yet.”

– ★★★★★½, *Limelight*

“Orchestra Victoria sizzles under the direction of VO’s artistic director, Richard Mills.”

– *The Australian*

“Lithuanian soprano, Vida Miknevičiūtė, was heroic in the name part. This may have been her *Salome* début, but it was clear from this, the second of three performances, that the role is already well under her skin. Miknevičiūtė sang with formidable accuracy, supple and piercing (though never strident) tone, and a febrile, dramatic presence.”

– ★★★★★ *Australian Book Review*



### VOYCE (Victorian Opera Youth Chorus Ensemble)

#### Opera-Bytes

A new series written by VOYCE  
Musical Director Angus Grant  
4 x 5-minute episodes  
20 hours of editing

#### VOYCE perform opera choruses:

Purcell's 'Hear my prayer O Lord'  
Donizetti's 'Saria Possibile'  
Verdi's 'O Signore, dal tetto natio'

### 15th Anniversary Celebrations

#### Livestream Event: Victorian Opera Celebrating 15 Years

32 over 15: Victorian Opera's  
Commissioned Works  
2005 – 2020

#### 15 Years of New Opera

6 episodes  
16 guests

### Education

#### Access All Areas: Livestream Program

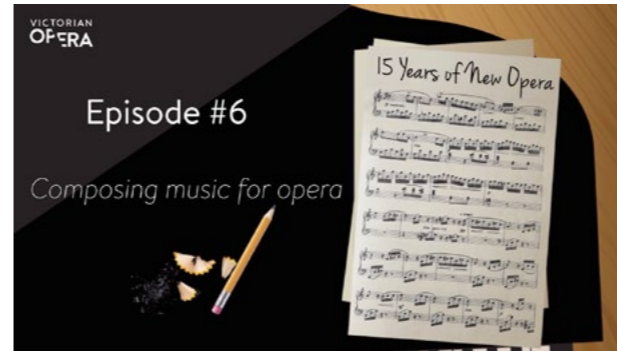
4 x 30-minute episodes  
1 x 50-minute opera

#### Baby Bilby Sings

An interactive digital songbook  
for babies and toddlers  
10 operatic songs performed,  
recorded, edited and included



From the Archives 24 excerpts



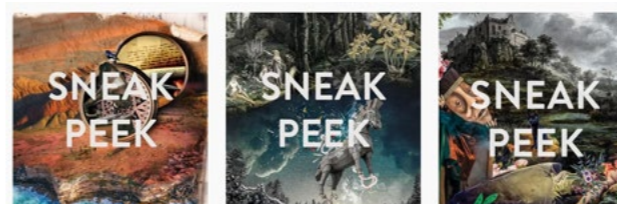
15 Years of New Opera 6 episodes



Opera-Bytes (VOYCE) 4 episodes



VOYCE 3 recordings



Season 2021 Sneak Peek 3 episodes

# 2020 Overview: Online Content

Online audience: 220,576

#### Livestreamed concert: And so this is Christmas

Eight singers,  
14 musicians from performance partner  
Orchestra Victoria, and four  
puppeteers from Black Hole Theatre

#### Carlos E. Bárcenas performed three solo videos:

Wash Your Hands  
Don't Touch Your Face  
Estrellita

#### Three Tales

1 world premiere featuring three new  
Australian operas

#### Artists in Isolation

27 episodes  
29 guests  
325 hours of editing

#### From the Archives

24 excerpts from Victorian Opera's  
past productions

#### In Recital

13 artist recitals, featuring much-loved  
local opera singers and musical  
theatre performers  
32 hours of filming  
175 hours of editing

#### Season 2021 Sneak Peek

3 x 10-minute episodes  
30 hours of editing





Photography and Illustration Credits:  
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 Scott Whinfield (p. 8)

## Education



Despite the disruptions and cancellations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Victorian Opera delivered a robust and broad-ranging Education offering in 2020.

At the beginning of the year, Victorian Opera welcomed babies and toddlers aged 0-3 years and their loved ones to Horti Hall to experience their first taste of opera with *Baby Bilby Sings*. Written and presented by members of Victorian Opera's core staff, this very young audience watched, listened and danced along as Baby Bilby travelled the world and met a range of colourful characters from many much-loved operas. This was also the first time many parents and grandparents attending had experienced opera.

As the country went into lockdown, the final two performances were cancelled and *Baby Bilby Sings* was transformed into an interactive digital songbook. Local singers were engaged to record the music excerpts while Victorian Opera's costume supervisor, Mel Serjeant, created beautiful illustrations. The book was shared broadly and made available to libraries, childcare centres, children's hospitals, and wildlife centres as well.

In 2020, Victorian Opera's *Access All Areas: Livestream Program* was delivered

to 4,583 students and 235 teachers across Victoria. The program, which provides students and teachers digital access to four livestreamed workshops and a livestreamed performance of the company's Education opera, required adjustments to ensure the safety of the artists and technical crew involved. An archival recording of Victorian Opera's 2021 Education opera, Massenet's *Cendrillon*, allowed the company to deliver the *Access All Areas: Livestream Program* in full.

Rehearsals for Victorian Opera's Youth Chorus Ensemble (VOYCE) were shifted online and reformatted so that ensemble members were introduced and mentored by a variety of guests within the arts industry. Director Cameron Menzies, singers Raphael Wong and Ali McGregor, as well as members of Victorian Opera's staff, joined the 50-strong group across several sessions. Each guest shared their expertise and workshopped performances by VOYCE members who volunteered to perform for their peers via Zoom.

VOYCE members also spent time learning and recording their individual parts in three different works, each of which were edited and released as performances alongside many other

online offerings released by Virtual Victorian Opera. Members of VOYCE were also invited to perform alongside tenor Douglas Kelly in *Opera-Bytes*, a series of four five-minute episodes written by VOYCE's musical director, Angus Grant. *Opera-Bytes* explored the difficulties first-year university students were experiencing with the sudden shift to online learning.

As part of its 15th anniversary celebrations, Victorian Opera published a coffee table book called *Thirty-two over fifteen: Victorian Opera's Commissioned Works 2005-2020* and released a six-part web series entitled *15 Years of New Opera*. Focussing on the process of creating a new opera, each episode featured interviews with the librettists, composers, singers and organisations who contributed to some of these commissioned works.

Throughout 2020, opera continued to inspire and expand the minds of many young audiences and engaged both emerging and established artists to continue sharing the joy of music.

**Ioanna Salmanidis**  
 Education Manager, Victorian Opera

## We thank our generous patrons

### Patron-in-Chief

The Hon. Linda Dessau AC,  
Governor of Victoria

### Founding Benefactors

The late Dame Elisabeth Murdoch AC  
Lady Potter AC

### Leadership Syndicate (40,000+)

Jane Hemstrich  
Hans & Petra Henkell  
Dr Michael Stubbs & Malcolm Roberts

### Artistic Director's Circle (10,000+)

John & Diana Frew  
The Gailey Lazarus Foundation  
Elizabeth Hill-Cooper  
Suzanne Kirkham  
Peter & Anne Laver  
Mercer Family Foundation  
Richard Mills AM  
Joy Selby Smith  
Nigel Simpson & Madeleine Coulombe in  
memory of Joseph H. Coulombe  
Prof Barbara van Ernst AM  
Dr John & Mrs Elizabeth Wright-Smith

### Platinum Patrons (\$5,000 +)

Beth Brown  
Carolyn & Stephen Coffey  
Michael Rigg & Gerard Condon AM  
Mary-Jane Gething  
Peter & Jenny Hordern  
Peter Lovell & Michael Jan  
Kaye E Marion  
Grant Powell & Sally McCutchan  
Greg Shalit & Miriam Faine

### Gold Patrons (2,500 +)

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Pam Caldwell  
Alan Chuck & Wendy Hughes Chuck  
Jim Cousins AO & Libby Cousins  
Jennifer Darbyshire & David Walker  
Earl of Wilton  
Freda Freiberg  
Bob Garlick  
Peter Garnick  
John & Gaye Gaylard  
Peter J. Griffin AM & Terry Swann  
Linda Herd  
Ian Kennedy AM & Dr Sandra Hacker AO  
Dr Garry Joslin & Prof. Dimity Reed AM  
Richard Laslett & Colin Gunther  
RJ-AM Charitable Trust  
Ian Manning & Alice De Jonge  
Ms Linley Martin  
Ian Merrylees  
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Tomasz & Elzbieta Romanowski  
Prof Cheryl Saunders & Ian Baker  
Marian & Ken Scarlett OAM  
Craig D'Alton & Peter Sherlock  
Lynne Sherwood  
The Sparky Foundation  
Rosemary & Dr Alan Tait  
Secret Admirers (2)

### Silver Patrons (1,000 +)

Dr Zita Ballok  
Laurie Bebbington & Elizabeth O'Keeffe  
Philip Benjamin & Sandy Benjamin OAM  
Nancy Bomford  
Box Family  
Stuart Brown  
Susan Brownrigg  
The Hon David Byrne  
Elise Callander  
Jennifer Cook  
Beatrice & Richard Donkin  
Dr M Elizabeth Douglas  
The Late Dr Helen M Ferguson  
Bill Fleming  
Brian Goddard  
Nance Grant AM MBE & Ian Harris  
Luke Hales  
John L Harrison & David J Wright  
Hartmut & Ruth Hofmann  
Damion Holling  
Anne Houlihan  
Simon L Jackson & Brian Warburton  
David Joseph  
Angela Kayser

The Hon Rod Kemp & Mrs Daniele Kemp  
Pat & Alun Kenwood  
Angela & Richard Kirsner  
John Landy AC & Lynne Landy  
Dr Anne Lierse  
Selina Lightfoot  
Ian & Judi Marshman  
Graham McCallum & Mary Kehoe  
Gillian Montgomery  
Isobel Morgan OAM  
Greg Noonan  
Elspeth & Brian Noxon  
Jillian Pappas & George Pappas AO  
Helen Paton  
Jane Patrick & Robert Evans  
Campbell & Christine Penfold  
Prof Michael Quinn AM & Prof Susan Carr  
John Rickard  
Kay Rodda  
Aubrey Schrader  
Phillip & Sue Schudmak  
John & Thea Scott  
Bernadette Slater & Charles Edmonds  
Michael Smith & Sonia Fuenteseca  
Patricia Stebbens  
James Syme  
Andrea Tappe  
Caroline & Richard Travers OAM  
Chris & Helen Trueman  
Neil Twist  
Prof. Belinda Tynan  
Russell Waters & Marissa Barter-Waters  
Ian Watts OAM  
Rev Noel Whale  
Diana & Robert Wilson  
Secret Admirers (5)

### Bronze Patrons (\$500+)

Seonaid Alexander  
Prof Dennis Altman AM  
Jenny Anderson  
Lesley Bawden  
Ines & Dr Donald Behrend  
Kirsty A Bennett  
Cheryl R Benson  
David Bernshaw & Caroline Isakow  
Stephen & Maura Best  
Ms Shirley Breese  
Dr Sylvia Cardale  
Mal & Marcia Carter  
Vivienne Corcoran  
Ian Dallas & Judith Hall  
Susan Donath  
Margaret Flatman  
Dennis Freeman  
Alan Gunther  
John Haasz  
Dr Janet Hiller  
Eduard Ingles & Kate Fryer  
Dr Irene Irvine & Prof. Iain Wallace  
Joan Janka  
Jack & Marie Kirszenblat  
Evelyn Kolar  
Dr Shirley Lanning  
Dr Kathy Laster  
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Paul & Glenys Lejins  
Siobhan Lenihan  
Dr Justus Lewis  
Dr Carlson Loke  
Dr Kristina & Bruce Macrae

Monita Mascitti-Meuter &  
Paul Mascitti  
Christopher McCabe  
Jocelyn & Andrew McLeish  
Douglas & Rosemary Meagher  
Beverley Middleton  
Susan Mountford  
Anne T Myers  
Jill Page OAM & Roy Page  
Lyn Payne  
Greg J Reinhardt AM  
Harold & Elspeth Riggall  
Michael Riordan & Geoff Bush  
Libby Smith & John Middleton  
Douglas Savige & Diane Mosley  
Bruce Sims & Peter Ronge  
John E Smith  
Dr Rosalynd Smith  
Lady Southey AC  
Julia Stoppa & Daniel Bogemann  
Christine Stott  
Teresa Tjia  
Catherine Walter AM  
In memory of Helen Robertson  
The late Ken & Merle Morris  
Secret Admirers (9)

## Patrons

The cancellation of all but one production in 2020 created unprecedented challenges to sustaining engagement with our supporters. In parallel with the institution of Virtual Victorian Opera, the Patron Program moved to a new stewardship model.

Thanks to the explosion in online conferencing, patrons were able to join us for virtual sessions with performers and key company members. This was complemented by a new bi-monthly newsletter, Patrons' Prelude.

These initiatives helped to keep our supporters informed about the ways we were continuing to produce opera during 2020 and our plans for re-emerging in 2021. That the levels of patronage increased in 2020 was a testament to the success of these actions. Additionally, the one silver lining of the cancellation of live performances was the \$99,828 that audience members generously donated in lieu of ticket refunds.

As this Annual Report is published, the success to date of Victorian Opera's 2021 offering reaffirms the faith demonstrated by our patrons during the most challenging year in the company's 15-year history.

**Louise O'Loughlin**  
Head of Development, Victorian Opera

### Bequests

Jenny Anderson  
Graeme Bawden & Len de Kievit  
Lesley Bawden  
Frank & Danielle Chamberlin  
Dr Garry Joslin & Prof. Dimity Reed AM  
Jane Kunstler  
Richard Laslett & Colin Gunther  
Gregory J Reinhardt AM  
Tony Wildman & Robert Gibbs  
Secret Admirers (6)

**If you are interested in becoming a Victorian Opera Patron, or having a confidential discussion about leaving a gift to Victorian Opera in your Will, please contact Louise O'Loughlin, on (03) 9001 6405 or [louise@victorianopera.com.au](mailto:louise@victorianopera.com.au)**

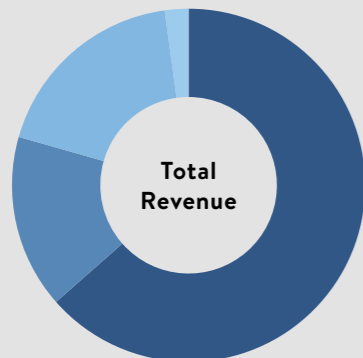
# Financials

Victorian Opera's total 2020 income was 94% of its 2019 income. The major contributors were ongoing government funding with the addition of JobKeeper payments and many audience members generously donating the cost of their tickets to cancelled performances. This was offset by an 88% reduction in box office income.

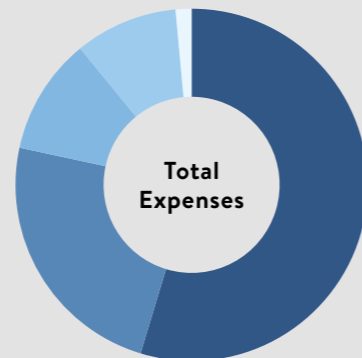
Expenses were impacted significantly as a consequence of not staging the vast majority of Season 2020 productions due to the Covid-19 pandemic and extended lockdown.

The resulting savings were applied to enhancing Victorian Opera's digital capabilities and upskilling staff accordingly. Moreover, such savings present the opportunity to enrich our artistic offering in ensuing years and our capacity to develop and attract new audiences. This financial position also helps to insulate Victorian Opera from further unexpected circumstances that may result in restricted audience numbers and snap cancellations.

## 2019

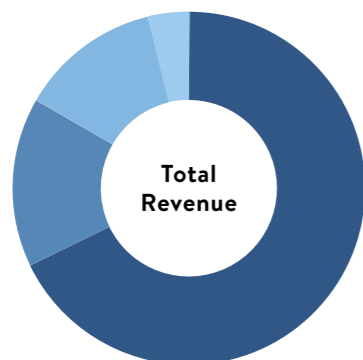


- Government funding 64%
- Box office and performance 16%
- Sponsorship, philanthropy and donation 18%
- Other 2%

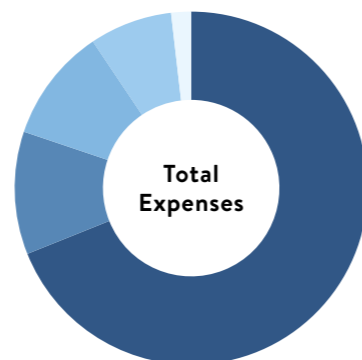


- Personnel (including artists and production staff) 55%
- Production 24%
- Administrative 11%
- Marketing and Development 9%
- Company Relocation Project 1%

## 2020



- Government funding 68%
- Sponsorship, philanthropic and donation income 15%
- Lease and other income (including JobKeeper) 13%
- Box Office and Performance income 4%



- Personnel expenses 69%
- Production expenses 11%
- Administrative expenses 13%
- Marketing and Development 8%
- Lease finance costs 2%

# Our Partners

We acknowledge and thank our partners who make our work possible

## Government Partners



Victorian Opera is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.



Victorian Opera is supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.

## Foundation Partner



## University Partner



## Awards



## Trusts and Foundations

The Marian & E.H. Flack Trust, Gailey Lazarus Foundation, Leo & Mina Fink Fund, William Angliss Charitable Fund



Henkell Family Fund 2, Ballandry (Peter Griffin Family) Fund

## Major Partners



## Official Partners



## Media Partners



## Supply Partners



## Corporate Member



## Performance Partners



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