

# VICTORIAN OPERA



## Annual Report 2021

## Chairman's Message

As summer holidays were in full swing, Victorian Opera was joyously rehearsing for our return to the marvellous Palais Theatre. Our season opening production of *The Sleeping Beauty* by Ottorino Respighi delighted children and adults alike with the skills and artistry of our life-sized puppets alongside our stellar cast of singers and performance partner, Orchestra Victoria.

Whilst the pandemic continued to take its toll, our agile team of core staff managed to present five of our scheduled productions. All were in some way affected by ongoing and unpredictable exigencies. With the determination of all involved and careful planning in collaboration with venues and performance partners, we were very proud to stage exceptional performances across Season 2021 under challenging circumstances. A highlight was a beautifully presented children's opera by celebrated Yorta Yorta woman Deborah Cheetham, *Parrwang Lifts the Sky*. This creation story of the Wadawurrung people was filmed and released as a digital offering, watched by over 5000 children, teachers and their families.

By mid-August, thwarted by Covid-19 restrictions and lockdowns, the company was required to cancel or postpone all remaining productions. Undeterred, Victorian Opera turned to online masterclasses and workshops with young singers. We presented a week-long intensive on *The Friends of Salamanca* resulting in an online performance of the work with more than 25 opera students participating via Zoom. As lockdown #6 was announced, *The Who's Tommy* was again postponed and the production packed up, in anticipation of a remount in early 2022. Richard Meale's *Voss*, which was also postponed, will see its presentation in collaboration with State Opera South Australia in May 2022.

Victorian Opera once again found itself the fulcrum for engagement with artists, technicians, patrons and students alike. The vibrancy of the industry was placed at the centre of our planning and guidance. With financial stability, we looked to supporting our artists, technicians and broader family in any way we could.

At the conclusion of 2021, we again partnered with Orchestra Victoria to offer a glimpse of the development of the talented young baritone, Stephen Marsh, our inaugural 2021 Opera Prize recipient, who presented to a small but appreciative audience.

As the Chair of Victorian Opera's Board, I wish to thank the Australia Council for the Arts, The State Government of Victoria through Creative Victoria and our long-standing foundation partner the Robert Salzer Foundation for their ongoing support. We are additionally grateful to all the trusts and foundations, patrons, corporate partners and audience members who unwaveringly support Victorian Opera. It must also be said, that we are immensely indebted to the leadership, energy and vision of our highly esteemed Chief Executive Officer, Elizabeth Hill-Cooper.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my fellow board members who gave support, guidance and expertise to our core staff at Victorian Opera and the wider artistic family. Whilst testing our resilience, 2021 was certainly a year of which there's much to be proud. The security of our place in the artistic landscape of Victoria, Australia and through our livestream offerings, now across the globe, is due to the staunch commitment of all our associated family to excellence in our artform.

**Genevieve Overell AM**  
Chair, Victorian Opera

## Our Board

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Genevieve Overell AM

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**2022 Board Observers**  
Laiza Garcia  
Ming Kang Chen

## Welcome

As many of you know, Victorian Opera presents its season program across many different venues throughout Melbourne and Victoria. Venue availability is both positive and challenging. With the majority of our 2021 season scheduled for presentation in the first half of the year, many warned that the pandemic was not over, and we would face difficulties in attempting to present major productions. Against all odds, we forged ahead scheduling ten productions, of which we were able to deliver five live onstage, despite the significant pandemic restrictions and impact on our industry.

The year started with our delightful production of Ottorino Respighi's *The Sleeping Beauty*. This production was only somewhat affected by the pandemic and with one swift reschedule of opening night due to a snap lockdown of five days, we managed to present all four performances of the work at the iconic Palais Theatre. A wonderful way to open our season, with the life sized puppets telling a tale of a community re-emerging from a pandemic.

Our second offering for 2021, was two commissioned works of one act each. The commissions were a direct response to the pandemic of the previous year and an attempt to keep our arts community in work and engaged. The creative teams of Kevin March and Jane Montgomery-Griffiths, and Simon Bruckard and Constantine Costi wrote *Echo and Narcissus* and *Cassandra* respectively. These works were presented at The Playhouse Theatre and received critical acclaim.

Our next presentation was Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers*. Staged at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl in Covid-safe seating pods, our patrons enjoyed the wonderful playing of Orchestra Victoria and the stellar singing of an all-Victorian cast.

Our education production and Access All Areas: Livestream Program was the commission of *Parrwang Lifts the Sky*. Written and composed by Yorta Yorta woman Deborah Cheetham based on a creation story of the Wadawurrung people, was set to be seen by over 5000 students and teachers across Victoria in both an in-person and live and on-demand streaming capacity.

Once again, the pandemic took hold, and we decided to complete rehearsals and film the production as theatres remained closed to audiences. However, thousands of students

engaged in the online presentation: such a positive demonstration of our community immersing themselves in this extraordinary fusion of opera and the language, culture and storytelling of the Wadawurrung people.

*Lorelei*, our 2018 commission from the team of Julian Langdon, Casey Bennetto and Gillian Gosgriff, was staged at the Palais Theatre and enjoyed healthy audience attendance, despite the loss of one performance. This work was also performed earlier in the year by Opera Queensland. Still as relevant as it was when first presented, our mythological Sirens led our audiences on a deep thinking sail down the Rhine!

*The Who's Tommy*, postponed from the previous year, went back into production in August 2021. Again hampered by Covid-related lockdowns, this extremely talented cast and creative team made it all the way to Palais stage via online rehearsals, working in parks to learn choreography, building costumes in remote workrooms and preparing video content, only to be stymied at the last hurdle by the now infamous Lockdown #6. Not to be thwarted, it was again rescheduled into the 2022 Season.

From this point, all remaining productions were cancelled or postponed for the remainder of the year due to theatre closures. When theatres re-opened, we were able to present a concert celebrating the inaugural Ballarat Opera Prize winner Stephen Marsh at the Palais Theatre in late November accompanied by Orchestra Victoria.

The Victorian Opera staff, board, patrons, and philanthropic and government supporters, have been incredible once again during 2021. The buzz words of the era have been overused in every way but the simple words, "thank you", are often overlooked. So, we Thank You, for all that you do, all that you have offered us and all that we will deliver moving on to 2022.

Elizabeth Hill-Cooper  
CEO, Victorian Opera

## 2021 Artist Engagement

239 singing artists received  
559 hours of coaching across  
107 private rehearsals

## New Australian Opera in Development

*Parrwang Lifts the Sky*  
Collaboration with Short Black Opera. World premiere on Saturday 19 June via Digital Access.

14 artists involved  
46% of the artistic and creative cast are First Nations people

## Digital Access

Artistic Director Richard Mills and Victorian Opera's music staff coached 17 Melbourne University Master of Music (Opera Performance) students across 15 x 3-hour workshops

# 2021 Overview: Performance

## The Sleeping Beauty

23 - 26 February, 2021  
Palais Theatre, St Kilda

Total Audience  
**1,908**

Three *The Sleeping Beauty* insight talks

“Victorian Opera’s long-awaited 2021 season has finally begun. And what better way to begin than with this 80-minute (so no germicidal interval crush required) operatic gem about a community that faces catastrophe, hibernates, then emerges in happier times.”

– ★★★★★, *Limelight*

“Victorian Opera’s *Sleeping Beauty* is just what the doctor ordered... Simply magical.”

– *Classic Melbourne*

“A flexible design of huge, luminous frilled drums are used to portray everything from a quagmire to a royal hall, and Philip Lethlean’s lighting design uses low-fi shadow puppet techniques to conjure bonfires and the passing of the time. Visually, *The Sleeping Beauty* is dazzling, summoning up all the magic any fairytale deserves.”

– *Time Out*

# Inspiring Audiences

Victorian Opera reached a national and international audience of

## 30,930

across

## 272

performances, activities and streamed events.

## 1,277

audience members for *Cassandra* and *Echo and Narcissus* at Arts Centre Melbourne's Playhouse.

## 4,504

audience members attended *Lorelei* in Melbourne and Brisbane.

## 14,219

Unique views of the Access All Areas: Livestream Program's four workshops and performance, streamed live and on-demand to 4,915 students and 346 teachers.

## 1,069

Attendees at the one night only performance of *The Pearl Fishers* at The Sidney Myer Music Bowl.



### Cassandra/Echo and Narcissus

"Sam Strong directs this double bill with a surety of vision and a lot of class. Both pieces are allowed space to develop, but there are also clever design elements that link them, from Cordingley's dazzlingly effective set to Jackson's rich, expressive lighting."

- *Australian Arts Review*



### Lorelei

"Victorian Opera presents another world premiere with this operatic cabaret that wears its feminist intellect on its sleeve."

- ★★★★★, *Limelight*



## PRODUCTIONS IN 2021

### Parrwang Lifts the Sky

"The chamber ensemble of 13 musicians treated the score with skilled assurance, finding both lively colour and nuance under the guidance of Richard Mills' baton."

- *Classic Melbourne*



### The Pearl Fishers

"The playing was faultless, the music perfectly balanced and the tempi ever so thoughtful. And, from start to finish, the hard yards of preparation delivered meaning for what was just one performance only."

- ★★★★★½, *Limelight*

### The Sleeping Beauty

"The Sleeping Beauty is dazzling, summoning up all the magic any fairytale deserves"

- *Time Out*





Photography and Illustration Credits:  
Bri Hammond (p. 8), Hipworth (Cover), Jeff Busby (p. 3-7, 10-12), Mel Serjeant (p. 8), Pia Johnson (p. 7, 14), Charlie Kinross (p. 12)



## Education

2021 was once again disrupted by Covid however this did not stop Victorian Opera from delivering its education programs across the year.

The company's Access All Areas: Livestream Program reached 4,915 students and 418 teachers from fifty schools located across Victoria. Across the four workshops, students and teachers were exposed to the different voice types unique to opera, were taught how to conduct by Richard Mills, discovered the design and direction process with Elizabeth Hill-Cooper, learnt about Wadawurrung people, language and culture with Wadawurrung woman Corrina Eccles, and learnt how to sing a song in Wadawurrung language from the opera with Deborah Cheetham and other cast members.

While the first two workshops were delivered from Horti Hall, the June lockdown saw all staff quickly shift to using Zoom and pre-recording content to deliver the remaining two workshops. Thankfully, easing of restrictions meant that Victorian Opera was able to film the performance of *Parrwang Lifts the Sky* in Arts Centre Melbourne's Playhouse Theatre, which was then broadcast out to schools to close the program.

*Parrwang Lifts the Sky*, written and composed by Deborah Cheetham saw Victorian Opera work closely with Short

Black Opera and Wadawurrung artists, and also connect with Wadawurrung people, language and culture to stage the work and produce the livestream workshops.

It was delightful to have VOYCE (Victorian Opera's Youth Chorus Ensemble) participants return to in-person rehearsals at the beginning of 2021 after the challenges of the year before. Unfortunately, the program had to return to an online platform with the return of state wide lockdowns in May, however the benefit to this saw participants engage with professional artists and creatives both locally and internationally-based, including Ali McGregor, Emma Muir-Smith, Verity Hunt-Ballard, Tanja Binggeli and Siobhan Stagg. The opportunity to listen to and ask questions of these established professionals was invaluable and participants took up the opportunity to do so with great enthusiasm.

Held between lockdowns, Victorian Opera's new collaboration with Montsalvat saw young singers local to Eltham and surrounding suburbs join young singers connected with the company to rehearse and perform a semi-staged production of *The Grumpiest Boy in the World*. Taking place in the Term 2 school holidays, the cast of twenty worked alongside

and were mentored by professional singer Douglas Kelly, Victorian Opera's Artistic Director Richard Mills and CEO Elizabeth Hill-Cooper to develop their performance skills in an intensive setting. The program concluded with three performances, given to a total number of 240 patrons.

The annual Youth Opera Program was unfortunately also a casualty of Covid with performances cancelled for the season. However, the production's cast and chorus worked with their director to realise a version of the production and stage the work within the confines of individual bedrooms via Zoom. The sessions were held over the course of a week and concluded with an online 'performance', pieced together by the pre-recorded ensemble numbers cast members created during the week, and arias sung live by the soloists and covers.

While it was a year fraught with challenges, the company should be proud of its education outputs and that we were able to continue bringing opera to young people across Victoria and support young singers during disconnected and isolating times.

**Ioanna Salmanidis**  
Education Manager, Victorian Opera

#### 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+)

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Hans & Petra Henkel  
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The Gailey Lazarus Foundation  
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Suzanne Kirkham  
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Michael Rigg & Gerard Condon AM  
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Nigel Simpson & Madeleine Coulombe in  
Memory of Joseph H. Coulombe  
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Secret Admirers (1)

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Secret Admirers (1)

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Ms Linley Martin AO  
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The Sparky Foundation  
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Secret Admirers (1)

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In Memory of Michael Bush  
The Hon David Byrne  
Elise Callander  
Jennifer Cook  
Beatrice & Richard Donkin  
Dr M Elizabeth Douglas  
The Late Dr Helen M Ferguson  
Margaret Flatman  
Bill Fleming  
Nance Grant AM MBE & Ian Harris  
John Haasz  
Luke Hales  
John L Harrison & David J Wright  
Peter & Melissa Hebbard  
Hartmut & Ruth Hofmann  
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Anne Houlihan  
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Isobel Morgan OAM  
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Elspeth & Brian Noxon  
Jillian Pappas & George Pappas AO  
Helen Paton  
Jane Patrick & Robert Evans  
Campbell & Christine Penfold  
REA Group  
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Kay Rodda  
Aubrey Schrader  
Phillip & Sue Schudmak  
John & Thea Scott  
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Libby Smith & John Middleton  
Michael Smith & Sonia Fuenteseca  
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Ian Watts OAM

Rev Noel Whale  
Diana & Robert Wilson  
Secret Admirers (6)

#### Bronze Patrons (\$500+)

Seonaid Alexander  
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Ian Dallas & Judith Hall  
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Nillumbik U3A  
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Greg J Reinhardt AM  
Elspeth & the late Harold Riggall  
Michael Riordan & Geoff Bush  
Douglas Savige & the late Diane Mosley  
Bruce Sims & Peter Ronge  
Dr Rosalynd Smith  
Julia Stoppa & Daniel Bogemann  
Christine Stott  
Teresa Tjia  
Neil Twist & Leon McEnroe  
Catherine Walter AM  
Raymond Wilkinson  
Beth Woollacott  
In memory of Helen Robertson  
Secret Admirers (11)

#### Bequestors

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  
Lorraine Weiner & Geoffrey Blick  
Tony Wildman & Robert Gibbs  
Secret Admirers (6)

## Patrons

Once again, our patrons demonstrated their commitment to Victorian Opera by maintaining and in many cases increasing their annual gift during 2021, despite the ongoing challenges of the pandemic.

The encouragement and trust exhibited by this extraordinary group of individuals was nothing short of exceptional and a great demonstration of their respect for the work we do and commitment to our long-term vision.

For this, we remain eternally grateful and extend our heartfelt thanks to these loyal patrons.

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

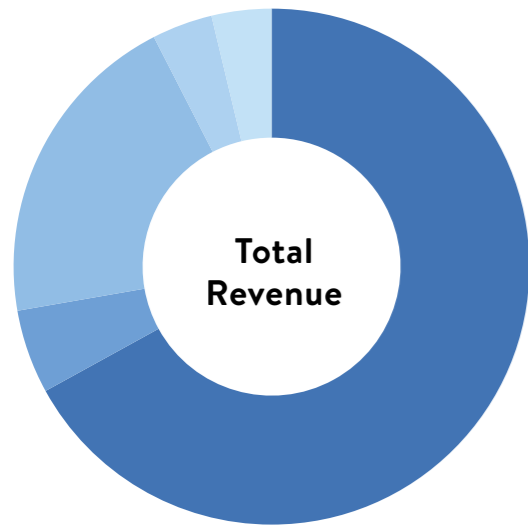
#### Bequests

The Estate of the late Margaret Anne Brien  
The Estate of the late Maxwell Herbert  
Charles Schultz

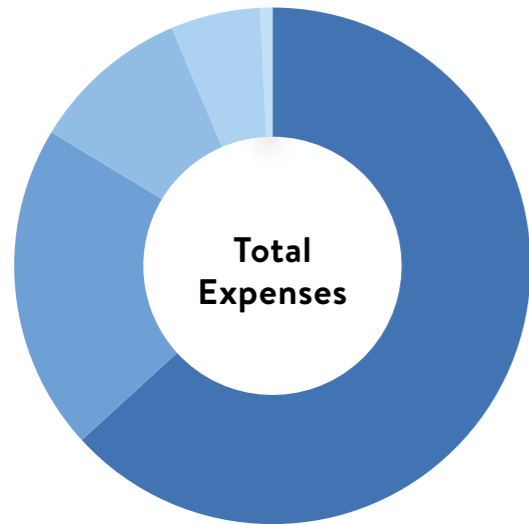
If you are interested in becoming a Victorian Opera Patron, or having a confidential discussion about leaving a gift to Victorian Opera in your Will, please contact Louise O'Loughlin, Development Manager on (03) 9001 6405 or email [louise@victorianopera.com.au](mailto:louise@victorianopera.com.au)

*Current at time of printing.*

# Financials



- Government funding **67%**
- Box office and performance **5%**
- Sponsorship, philanthropy and donation **20%**
- Lease and other income **4%**
- Bequests income **4%**



- Personnel (including artists and production staff) **63%**
- Production **20%**
- Administrative **10%**
- Marketing and Development **6%**
- Lease finance costs **1%**



# Our Partners

We acknowledge and thank our partners who make our work possible

## Government Partners

Australian Government

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.

Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) Fund – an Australian Government initiative

## Foundation Partner



## University Partner



## Awards



## Trusts and Foundations

The Marian & E.H. Flack Trust

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