

VICTORIAN
OPERA

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VICTORIAN OPERA | WILD RICE

The Butterfly Lovers

Victorian Opera and Wild Rice presents

The Butterfly Lovers

A NEW OPERA IN ONE ACT

Composer **Richard Mills**

Librettist **Joel Tan**

CREATIVES

Conductor **Richard Mills**

Conceived and Directed by **Ivan Heng**

Multimedia/Set Designer **Ivan Heng, Brian Tan**

Costume Designer **Max Tan**

Lighting Designer **Philip Lethlean**

Sound Designer **Jim Atkins**

CAST

Father / Zhu Haotian Qi

Zhu Yingtai Cathy-Di Zhang

Liang Shanbo Meili Li

CHORUS

Kate Amos, Elizabeth Barrow, Michael Dimovski*, Shakira Dugan*,
James Emerson, Stephen Marsh**, Shanul Sharma, Syrah Torii

The engagement of Director Ivan Heng and the appearance of Meili Li in the role of Liang Shanbo are made possible through the generosity of Circle5 Foundation Pty Ltd.

*The appearances of Shakira Dugan and Michael Dimovski are made possible through the generosity of Dr Michael Stubbs and Malcolm Roberts.

**The appearance of Stephen Marsh is made possible through the generosity of The Family of the late Frederick R Davidson AM.

Victorian Opera Chamber Orchestra, featuring traditional Chinese instruments

12 - 15 October

Arts Centre Melbourne, Playhouse

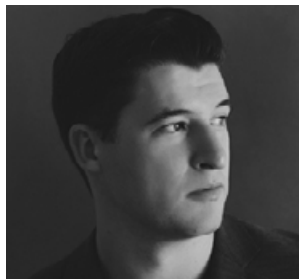
World premiere

Running time is approximately 1 hour 20 minutes, with no interval

Sung in English

Victorian Opera dedicates this premiere season of *The Butterfly Lovers* to the memory of Max Riebl, who was to sing the role of Liang Shanbo in this production. Max was a great talent whose life was tragically cut short by cancer this year.

Victorian Opera extends its sympathy and support to his family as a reflection of the affection and esteem in which Max was held by the music profession.



Production

Production Team

Stage Manager **Carli Griffin**
Deputy Stage Manager
Rain Okpamen Iyehen
Production Coordinator **Guinevere Rose**
Costume Supervisor **Mel Serjeant**
Costume Supervisor Assistant **Justine Haselton**
Wig Designer **Trent Whitmore**
Prop Maker **Alex Donnelly**
Assistant Costume Designer **Waitoh Wong**
Costume Intern **Jia Ling Chua**

Music Staff

Principal Repetiteur **Phoebe Briggs**
Repetiteur **Su Choung**

Orchestra

Violin I **Nicholas Waters**
Violin II **Michael Loftus-Hills**
Viola **Ruby Shirres**
Cello **Mee Na Lojewski**
Double Bass **Robert Nicholls**
Clarinet I **Andrew Fong**
Clarinet II **Cameron Smith**
Harp **Julie Raines**
Percussion **Peter Neville**
Keyboard/Celeste **Phoebe Briggs**
Piano/Celeste **Su Choung**
Pipa (Chinese Lute) **Lu Liu**
Dizi (Chinese Flutes) **Qui Ming Dong**

Season Staff

Surtitle Operator
Timothy Mallis
Orchestra Manager
Noah Chrapot
Performance Crew
Guinevere Rose
Alex Donnelly
Costumiers
Kim Bishop
Catherine Chan
Jemma Eton
Jacinda Hill
Wig & Make up team
Simone Carter
Bianca Armiento
Kim McConville

Acknowledgements

Keyboard supply and programming
Joe Petrolo
Ausfeng
Cindy Xin
Set pieces
Show Works, Creative Solutions
Set elements
Imported Theatre Fabrics

CEO's Message

Welcome to our season of *The Butterfly Lovers*. As I write this message, I am watching rehearsals with our three soloists and Ivan Heng, Richard Mills and Phoebe Briggs on piano. Joel Tan's poetic and evocative libretto is being explored and brought to life. It is such a privilege to watch great people of theatre and music create a new work of an old legend.

This work has been many years in the planning, conceiving, and creating and now with all the elements coming together, it feels that this collaboration between Victorian Opera and Wild Rice is creating a new legend. Our two companies have been travelling back and forth between Singapore and Australia as is the legend of the Butterfly Lovers not wanting to finally part. Through the recent years of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have all persevered and now the final presentation is here. I will be forever in the debt of Bee Bee Koh and Tony Trickett who have worked with me to realise this collaboration since 2015.

Many people have contributed to this work and its creation. Thank you to our patrons who have believed in this collaboration and contributed so generously. Thank you to the Australia Council for the Arts, the State Government of Victoria, through Creative Victoria and our long standing partnership with the Robert Salzer Foundation. These vital individuals, organisations and foundations are crucial to the ongoing vibrancy of our art form and without them performances such as *The Butterfly Lovers* would not be possible.

This presentation of *The Butterfly Lovers* breathes life into an ancient story with modern insights. Please join us on the 'long bridge' in Changqiao Park, Hangzhou and witness the majesty of this collaboration come to life.

Enjoy.

ELIZABETH HILL-COOPER
CEO

Composer's Message

This chamber opera project is the result of my admiration for Ivan Heng and the wonderful Wild Rice based in Singapore. Ivan is, in my opinion, one of the great theatre makers of Asia.

The theatrical process of this work is founded in the ritual language of Chinese opera characterised by highly stylised story telling, visual spectacle and formalised interactions between characters.

The Singaporean poet and playwright, Joel Tan, has made a libretto which reflects in contemporary English language the time honoured formalities of traditional Chinese opera in an eminently singable and concise text.

The musical language and the instrumental textures similarly incorporate traditional elements in the form of subliminal pentatonic references, folk-like interludes and the presence of both pipa (Chinese lute) and dizi (Chinese flutes) in the instrumentation. These elements are subsumed into my own musical process – not simply 'added in' – so the music is contemporary – a counterpart to Joel's libretto in contemporary English.

Opera (both Eastern and Western) is an artform of synthesis – of a fusion of disparate elements to form a new statement. It became a new theatrical adventure via a process of amalgamation which is present in both the traditional Chinese opera which was established during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and European Opera which can be said to have begun with Monteverdi's *Orfeo* in 1607, with a fusion of myth-based scenography with the different styles of baroque and late renaissance music. The richness of synthesis is present in our current undertaking, an ancient story, contemporary and traditional musical practice, traditional focus being influenced and renewed in contemporary theatrical language, presenting a love story to which we have given a new meaning which celebrates the redeeming potential of love in all its forms and possibilities.

RICHARD MILLS
Artistic Director, Composer

Director's Note

In 2015, Richard Mills and I met for the first time and making an instant connection, we resolved to collaborate on a new opera, an international collaboration that would speak to both our audiences in Melbourne and Singapore.

Instead of choosing a work from the existing Western canon, I proposed that we tell the story of *The Butterfly Lovers*, a beloved classic and one of the four great folktales of China. Known as the Chinese Romeo & Juliet, Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai's tragic, but ultimately transcendent, love story has inspired artists through the ages. But it had not, to our knowledge, been adapted into an English-language opera. We both became quite excited.

What distinguishes our version is that it unpacks what largely exists as subtext in more conventional adaptations of the tale. When Shanbo first meets Yingtai, she is disguised as a man to get herself an education. Shanbo never questions Yingtai's identity, even though she persistently hints at it; and he only reciprocates her love when she reveals that she is a woman. But what if Shanbo had in fact fallen in love with Yingtai as a man?

With plans to premiere the work in Melbourne in September 2020, we commissioned Joel Tan, one of Singapore's most exciting emerging playwrights, to adapt the story, and he sent us a libretto that we loved. In early 2019, Richard and I met in Singapore to workshop the production at Wild Rice.

As with so much else, the pandemic threw a spanner in the works. The show was postponed twice, but we persisted through the most extraordinary conditions, virtually, in different countries, and across time zones.

I can hardly believe that it was just four weeks ago that the entire company came together in the rehearsal room. The past month has been a crucible of creativity, at once chaotic and thrilling. Listening and learning from one another, we approached the collaborative process with mutual respect for our diverse cultural traditions, disciplines, and industry practices.

We trust that this brand-new production of *The Butterfly Lovers*, an intricate tapestry of myriad elements, will be greater than the sum of its parts. Richard's finely wrought score is at once grand and intimate, mining the layers of Joel's elegiac libretto to illuminate the characters' emotional journeys. The drama unfolds on a bare stage rooted in the Chinese opera tradition – a canvas for Brian Gothong Tan's striking multimedia, Philip Lethlean's atmospheric lighting and Max Tan's splendid costumes.

It is nothing short of a miracle that we are premiering a new work in these times. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the singers, our creative and production teams, and everyone at Victorian Opera and Wild Rice who have rallied behind our shared vision to tell this story. Thank you from the bottom of my heart, dear Richard and Elizabeth, for your trust, care and the amazing journey we've shared.

Last but not least, thank you for coming to share in the experience of *The Butterfly Lovers* today. 'Beyond form, beyond language and thought' – we hope you will find something here that delights, moves and inspires you.

IVAN HENG

Founding Artistic Director, Wild Rice

Synopsis

A chorus of Divinity Spirits sets the scene for a story of desire and tragedy.

Zhu emerges into a powerful storm regretting his decision to allow his daughter, Zhu Yingtai to study at the Academy. Yingtai, dressed as a man, pleads with her Father to let her go. As the storm abates and sunrise beckons, Yingtai's Father blesses her departure with one condition - when he calls her, she must come back in haste.

Yingtai departs for the Academy. The journey is long. On her travels, she meets a fellow scholar, Liang Shanbo at a bridge by the crossroads. There is an instant attraction to one another. Welcoming each other's company, they agree to journey together to the Academy.



After many months of travel, the fellow scholars arrive at the Master's Academy. Shanbo and Yingtai greet the Master with recommendations from their respective Fathers to join the Academy. The Master questions Yingtai's anxious nature. Both Yingtai and Shanbo worry that the Master may not accept Yingtai into the Academy. Shanbo speaks up for Yingtai, telling the Master of Yingtai's great mind and desire for knowledge. The Master accepts Yingtai's Father's seal as her guarantee.

The two students are shown to their chamber where they share a bed. They swear brotherly love.

As the seasons change, the students continue their learning under the Master's strict guidance. On a beautiful spring day, Yingtai and Shanbo play truant by the river. Under the heady spell of spring, the two begin flirting and declare their desire for one another's bodies before being interrupted by fellow students. On their return to the Academy, the Master intercepts Yingtai and tells her he has uncovered her secret. As Yingtai's spirit and intellect is rare, the Master agrees to allow her to continue her studies with a warning that she must not succumb to her feelings for Liang Shanbo. He reminds her that the academy is a place of learning, and that her duty is to her father and her future husband.

At Yingtai's family home, a rich merchant Ma Wencai, asks Zhu for his daughter's hand in marriage. Zhu agrees to the union and sends for his daughter.

As summer folds into autumn, Shanbo is confused as he struggles with his feelings for Yingtai. Yingtai is cold to him so as not to fail her Master's wishes; and she has kept up her disguise by washing and redressing as a man each night when Shanbo is asleep.

A Messenger arrives at the Academy to seek the return of Yingtai as the auspicious day approaches. The Master breaks the news to Yingtai that her Father has summoned her. The following morning, she leaves to return home. Grief stricken, Shanbo accompanies her to the bridge at the crossroads where they first met. Here, Yingtai insists they part.

Upon Yingtai's return to her Father's home, Ma Wencai attends the blessing of the union by the Fortune Teller. As the wedding is declared a perfect union, Yingtai feels trapped, gasping for air.

Shanbo arrives in the courtyard of the Zhu household, searching for his sworn brother Yingtai. He has travelled for weeks and seeing Yingtai, now dressed as a woman, asks her whether she is the twin sister. Yingtai tells him that her brother is away. As he turns to leave, Yingtai unveils her true identity to Shanbo. She tells him she is to be married and that they cannot be together. Yingtai begs him to leave.

Shanbo leaves, and returning to the crossroads, is overcome with grief and dies.

Yingtai and Ma Wencai's wedding day arrives. On the way to the ceremony, Yingtai sees the tomb of Shanbo. A terrible storm erupts as Yingtai breaks free from the procession, calling on the Heavens for Shanbo's grave to open and bury her.

As the storm abates, the two lovers are reunited, their souls transformed and whispered into the air. In the Divine realm, beyond this world and all suffering, they can forever be together.



Creative Team



Richard Mills
Conductor/Composer

Internationally recognised composer Richard Mills, AM, pursues a diverse career as composer, conductor and artistic director, with an extensive discography of orchestral works including his own compositions.

Currently Artistic Director of Victorian Opera, and Senior Fellow, Faculty of Music, University of Melbourne, Richard has been Artistic Director of the Adelaide Chamber Orchestra and West Australian Opera, Director of the Australian Music Project for Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and Musica Viva's Composer of the Year. His recording of the film music of Franz Waxman with the QSO was awarded the Preis der Deutschen Schallplatten Kritik in 1992.

This year Richard conducts *Elektra*, *The Butterfly Lovers* (Mills) and *La Cenerentola* for Victorian Opera, and *Voss* for State Opera South Australia.

Recent highlights include the world premiere of his Christmas oratorio *Nativity* with Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, *The Pearlfishers* and *Parrwang Lifts the Sky* for Victorian Opera, the ASO at Adelaide Festival and *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* for State Opera South Australia.



Ivan Heng
Concept and
Direction/Set
Designer

Ivan Heng is one of Singapore's most prominent and dynamic creative personalities. In a pioneering career spanning more than three decades, Ivan has directed, acted in and designed many landmark Singapore theatre productions, which have been performed in more than 20 cities around the world.

Ivan founded Wild Rice in 2000. Under his leadership, the company has reached out to an audience of more than a million people and is at the vanguard of creating theatre with a distinctive Singaporean voice. Its ground-breaking theatre complex opened in September 2019 with a mission to create and present the best of Singapore theatre, nurture young artists and audiences, and leave a legacy of artistic excellence for generations to come.

In 2013, Ivan was awarded the Cultural Medallion, Singapore's highest cultural honour. He has a law degree from the National University of Singapore and trained at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RSAMD).



Joel Tan
Librettist

Joel Tan is a Singaporean playwright based in London and Singapore. Recent work in the UK includes *No Particular Order* at Theatre503; *When the Daffodils* at the Orange Tree Theatre; *Living Archive* at the Royal Court; *Ghosts in the Blood* for Audible UK; and *Augmented Chinatown* with Chinese Arts Now. He is under commission with the Royal Court, Headlong Theatre, and the Almeida Theatre.

In Singapore, his plays have been produced by leading theatre companies like Checkpoint Theatre, Wild Rice, and Pandemonium, and several are available in a collection, *Joel Tan Plays Volume 1*, published by Checkpoint Theatre. He is a Creative Associate with Centre 42's New Writing Development Programme, and runs its Professional Development Residency for playwrights.



Brian Tan
Multimedia/Set Designer

Brian Gothong Tan is one of the leading creatives in Singapore and is best known for his cutting-edge and highly engaging works in theatre, film and installation art. He graduated from California Institute of the Arts in 2005 under the Shell-NAC Scholarship. His works have been featured in numerous productions which have toured successfully in many countries like Italy, USA, Korea and the United Kingdom. His notable projects include *Tropical Traumas* (Singapore International Festival of Arts 2016), the Singapore Bicentennial Experience, *Lost Cinema 20/20* (2021, Esplanade) and *Havoc Girls and Kamikaze Boys* (2021, M1 Fringe and NAFA). He was conferred the Young Artist Award in 2012, and more recently, the Singapore Youth Award in 2015. He is currently the artistic director for T:>Atelier under T:>Works.



Max Tan
Costume Designer

Max started his eponymous label MAX.TAN on the back of the recognition he received at the Singapore Fashion Designers Contest in 2007. MAX.TAN was invited to showcase at Modelfabriek (Amsterdam) in 2010 and became the first Asian-based label ever to do so. The collection was subsequently featured by Vogue Paris and went on to win second place at that year's China Fashion Creation Contest. Today, MAX.TAN is represented by Boon showroom (Paris) where it has started making inroads onto the international fashion scene. Over the past decade, Max has been recognized for his innovative designs that challenge fashion trends while incorporating his Asian roots.



Philip Lethlean
Lighting Designer

Philip Lethlean designs lighting for projects across Australia, Asia, Europe and America including theatre, opera, dance, circus, puppetry, large cultural events and architecture. Commissions include the Melbourne International Comedy Festival, the opening ceremony of the Pacific Games in PNG (2015), *Clusters of Light in Sharjah UAE* (2014), *How to Train Your Dragon* for Dreamworks/Global Creatures (2012), *White Night Melbourne* (2013/2014), *the Australian Pavilion* at Expo Shanghai and the opening of Hamer Hall.

Theatre works include the English National Ballet, The Australian Opera, MTC, Circus Oz and *Into the Woods*, *Sweeney Todd* and *The Sleeping Beauty* for Victorian Opera.



Jim Atkins
Sound Designer

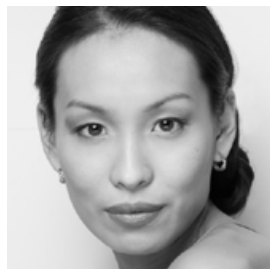
Jim Atkins designs and mixes sound for a host of live, installed and recorded situations nationally and internationally. Recent highlights include *The Pearl Fishers*, Victorian Opera (Sydney Myer Music Bowl); *Australian Ballet Summertime Gala* (MCA); *Cassandra / Echo & Narcissus* (Victorian Opera); *Four Winds Festival* (Bermagui); *One Infinity* (Melbourne, Sydney and Perth Festivals); *Pleasure Garden* (Sydney Festival, Norfolk and Norwich Festival, City of London Culture Mile), *24 Reasons to Party* (Kate Ceberano / Adelaide Symphony Orchestra); *Setan Jawa* (AsiaTOPA/ Humboldt Forum Kultur, Berlin); *Between 8&9* (Chamber Made, Castlemaine Festival, Chengdu China); *National Geographic*, *Symphony for our World* (Adelaide Festival); *Carmen in the Square* (State Opera South Australia); *Absolute Bird*, *Sounds of the Outback* (City of London Sinfonia).

Cast



Haotian Qi
Zhu / Master

One of Australia's finest baritones Christian Haotian Qi graduated with an honours Bachelor of Arts degree from Nanjing Art University in China and completed his Master Degree in Opera Performance at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. Christian started his operatic career as a Young Artist with Opera Australia in the Moffatt Oxenbould Young Artist Program. In 2022 he made his successful role debut as Marcello in *La Bohème* at the Sydney Opera House. His other operatic roles includes: Giove in *La Calisto*, the title role in *Don Giovanni*, Albert in *Werther*, Don Profondo in *Il Viaggio a Reims*, Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte*, Escamillo/Dancairo/Morales/Zuniga in *Carmen*, Count Danilo Danilovitch in *The Merry Widow*, Ping in *Turandot*, Figaro in *The Barber of Seville*. Christian will be making his debut with Victorian Opera in Richard Mill's new opera *The Butterfly Lovers* performing the roles of Zhu and Master.



Cathy-Di Zhang
Zhu Yingtai

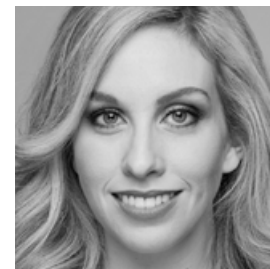
Award-winning Australian soprano, Cathy-Di Zhang, is an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music, London. For Opera Australia, she has performed the roles of Micaëla (*Carmen*) and Rosina (*The Barber of Seville*) on tour and appeared with them in chamber music at Uluru. For Pinchgut Opera, she performed the roles of Amour/La folie in Neil Armfield's acclaimed production of *Platée* (Rameau) and will be returning at the end of the season in the role of Créuse in Charpentier's *Médée*. Earlier this year, she made her State Opera South Australia debut as Mimi in *Bohème on the beach* to over 6000 people, now streaming on SBS. Prior to the pandemic, Cathy-Di sang the role of Mädchen in K.Weill's *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* in a new production by Ivo van Hove for Festival d'Aix-en-Provence and Dutch National Opera. Other opera credits include *Fiordiligi*, *Cendrillon*, *Lauretta*, *Nella*, *Gretel* and *Lisa*. Aside from opera, Cathy-Di has appeared as a soloist with orchestras all over Europe and China and is an avid recitalist and chamber musician.



Meili Li
Liang Shanbo

Meili Li is the first Chinese countertenor to have an international career. He is the winner of the 2nd Prize and Farinelli Prize at the London Handel Festival Singing Competition, and has worked in major opera houses and international festivals. Recent operatic highlights include Eunuch in *Die Nase* at Bavarian State Opera, Spirito in *Orfeo* in a Royal Opera House production, Alessandro in *Tolomeo* at Karlsruhe Händel Festspiele, title roles in *Giustino* at Theater an der Wien, *Tolomeo* at Theater Lübeck, *Orfeo ed Euridice* at Blackwater Valley Opera Festival and *Fernando* at London Handel Festival. Following a BA in film and philosophy at Peking University, he studied singing at Royal Academy of Music where he graduated with an MA (Distinction, DipRAM), being one of the few students in the history of the Academy to receive full marks for his final recital. He then completed an Artist Diploma with Distinction at Guildhall School opera course. Li currently resides in Hamburg and regularly gives concerts across Europe and China.

Chorus



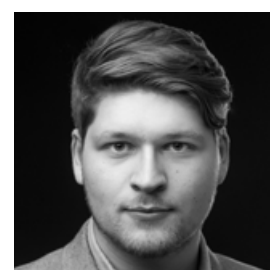
Kate Amos

Melbourne-born lyric coloratura Kate Amos is one of Australia's most artistically versatile and highly sought-after young sopranos. Kate holds a BMus with Honours, Dip. Lang (Italian) and Masters of Music (Opera Performance) from The University of Melbourne. Kate returned from Cardiff in 2017 after graduating from the Welsh International Academy of Voice on scholarship under the tutelage of Dennis O'Neill. In 2014 Kate was selected to join the Victorian Opera Young Artist Program performing many leading and supporting roles including Cendrillon and The Dew Fairy, among several highlights. Kate made her principal artist main-stage debut with Opera Australia in 2019 in world-premiere Australian opera *Whiteley* at the Sydney Opera House as daughter Arkie Whiteley. This followed with her Mozart debut to critical acclaim as "Barbarina" in Sir David McVicar's *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, also at the SOH. Kate also has extensive training in acting and classical ballet. Most recently she sang the iconic role of Glinda - The Good Witch of the South in *Il Mago di Oz* (Victorian Opera) and is thrilled to be singing in *The Butterfly Lovers*.



Elizabeth Barrow

Elizabeth Barrow, a high coloratura soprano, has been performing with Victorian Opera for 9 years. In 2018, Elizabeth travelled to Cardiff, Wales, to undertake a Masters in Music Performance at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama where she gained a scholarship with the BBC National Chorus of Wales. Since completing her Masters and returning to Australia, Elizabeth has recorded two CDs alongside Dr Robert James Stove: *The Undertones of War* and *French Romantic Church Music* and has also performed in Victorian Opera's productions of *Echo & Narcissus* and *The Pearl Fishers*.



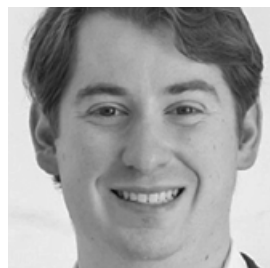
Michael Dimovski

A Melbourne based tenor who graduated from the University of Melbourne in 2017, Michael is the recipient of the 2022 Victorian Opera Michael Stubbs and Malcolm Roberts Opera Prize as well as the recipient of Melbourne Opera's Rotary NGSE scholarship to perform and experience Germany. Michael's most notable engagements include: Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* at the Opernakademie Henfenfeld, Germany, featured soloist at the Holzhauser Musiktage Meisterkurse in Ammerland, Germany, touring nationally throughout Australia as a member of the Ten Tenors throughout 2021, Malcolm in Verdi's *Macbeth*, Melbourne Opera, Froh (Cover) in *Das Rheingold*, Melbourne Opera and Jaquino in Beethoven's *Fidelio*, Melbourne Opera, and the Scarecrow in *Il Mago di Oz*, Victorian Opera.



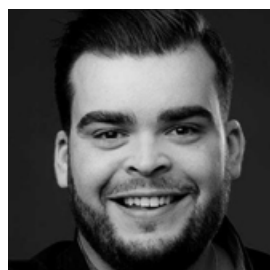
Shakira Dugan

Shakira made her professional operatic debut with Victorian Opera, playing the role Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel* in 2017. Since then, starring and covering roles in *The Magic Pudding the Opera*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, Rossini's *Otello*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Alice Through the Opera Glass*, *Mahagonny*, *Parsifal* as well as numerous concert performances, and making her international debut as Cherubino in Australian International Production's *Le Nozze di Figaro*. 2021 saw Shakira as a Principal Artist with Victorian Opera, creating the role of Cassandra in Simon Bruckard's new opera, *Cassandra*, and The Cuckoo in Respighi's *La bella dormiente nel bosco*. Shakira is a recipient of the 2022 Opera Prize with Victorian Opera.



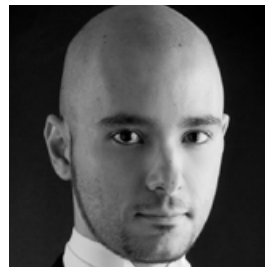
James Emerson

Bass baritone, James Emerson has performed in professional operatic productions and concerts for several years and has won numerous awards from many Eisteddfods and vocal competitions, and recently was a finalist in the 2021 Herald Sun Aria competition. James has completed his Master of Music in Opera Performance at The University of Melbourne where he performed roles such as Friedrich Bhaer and Gideon March (*Little Women*), Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*) and Seneca (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*). In 2022, James has joined Melba Opera Trust as one of their artists.



Stephen Marsh

Stephen Marsh is a 31-year-old baritone who resides in Geelong, Australia. He currently studies under the tutelage of the Welsh/Australian baritone, Roger Howell. Stephen made his professional debut in Victorian Opera's *Sleeping Beauty* in 2017 and was a developing artist for the company for both the 2017/2018 seasons. He has performed several roles with the company, which include: Zurga in *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* (Bizet) The Woodcutter in *Sleeping Beauty* (Respighi), Peter in *Hansel und Gretel* (Humperdinck) and The Giant in the Australian premiere of *The Selfish Giant* by Simon Bruckard and Emma Muir-Smith. In 2021 Stephen also made his European debut as Marcello in Puccini's *La Bohème* at the Verbier Festival in Switzerland. Stephen was a scholar with the prestigious Melba Opera Trust Programme for 2018/2019 as well as an inaugural member of Melbourne Opera's Richard Divall Emerging Artist Program. He is the recipient of several other awards, including an Ian Potter Cultural Trust Scholarship and the Australia Council Sir Robert Askin Operatic Scholarship.



Shanul Sharma

Tenor Shanul Sharma has performed major and leading roles with Opera Australia, the Bolshoi Theatre, Moscow, the Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro, the Teatro Olimpico for Festival Vicenza in Lirica, Teatro del Giglio in Lucca, and in Pavia, Italy. Shanul also represented the Rossini Opera Festival at the LaVerdi Auditorium, Milan and at the Norwegian National Opera, Oslo. He regularly appears as guest artist at festivals and gala performances in Australia, Italy and the United Kingdom, and featured at the Llangollen Festival in Wales in Christopher Tin's *Calling All Dawns*. Shanul holds an MA in Advanced Vocal Studies from the Wales International Academy of Voice in Cardiff.



Syrah Torii

Japanese-Australian mezzo-soprano Syrah Torii (she/her) graduated with a Master of Music (Opera Performance) from the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music in 2021. She is currently a Developing Artist in Melbourne Opera's Richard Divall Emerging Artists Programme. She has performed major roles in *Little Women* (Jo March), *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (Ottone), *Hänsel und Gretel* (Hänsel), and *Die Zauberflöte* (Third Lady). Syrah is regularly invited to sing the Japanese and Australian National Anthems at events hosted by the Japanese Consul-General in Melbourne. Syrah also holds a Bachelor of Arts (Linguistics and Spanish) and Diploma in Music (Classical Voice) from the University of Melbourne.

Featured Instrumentalists



Lu Liu
Pipa (Chinese Lute)

Lu Liu (also known as Lulu Liu) is a Lecturer in Music at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney. She commenced pipa study at the age of six, completing her undergraduate studies on pipa performance at the Shenyang Conservatory of Music and the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. She received her doctorate from the University of Sydney in 2019 for a thesis entitled 'The Chinese pipa and its music, from conservatory to concert hall and beyond: Case studies of pedagogues, popularisers and promoters.' Her article, 'Contemporary Chinese pipa music and its future', was published in *Asian Musicology* in 2012, and her book chapter on the canonization of the pipa repertoire was published with Routledge in 2020. She has contributed a growing number of articles and chapters in journals and books while continuing to engage as an international performer on the pipa. She frequently performs new pipa works by contemporary composers. Career highlights include performing for an audience of 7000 at the *World Peace Outdoor Festival* in South Korea as well as releasing two solo pipa albums, three collaborative albums and performing on Christopher Gordon's soundtrack to the movie *Mao's Last Dancer*. She has featured on the long-running BBC radio program *On the Wire* and ABC Radio National program including: *The Rhythm Divine* in the episode *Chinese Crossroads* (2016) and *The Music of China on The Music Show* with Andrew Ford (2018). Two documentaries of Lulu's musical pathways with China Central Television CCTV were broadcast in both 2019 and 2022.



Qui Ming Dong
Dizi (Chinese Flutes)

Dong Qiu-Ming graduated from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, after which he joined the Shanghai Film Orchestra as a flute (dizi) soloist. He has won numerous music competitions in China. His CD *Full Moon at My Homeland* was released in 1990. He was invited to be an adjudicator for the Singapore National Music competition in 1993. He is a member of the Australian Chinese Music Ensemble. The ensemble has performed at numerous music events and festivals around the Australia. He also teaches at Dun Huang arts academy in Melbourne.

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About Us



Reimagining the potential of opera and musical theatre, for everyone

Victorian Opera is the state opera company of Victoria. We make creative, accessible and affordable work for everyone while adventurously evolving our art form.

Since the company was founded in October 2005, Victorian Opera has entertained hundreds of thousands of people with our imaginative approach to opera and musical theatre. Each year we premiere at least one new Australian opera, and have commissioned 34 new works since our formation.

We employ hundreds of people across the creative industries, recruit some of the finest local singers, and collaborate with Australia's leading companies, venues and learning institutions.

The next generation of talent is developed from the ground up through the Victorian Opera Youth Chorus Ensemble (VOYCE) and our innovative Access All Areas: Livestream Program.

We also stage opera in Tasmania biennially to share the joy of our art form even further.

Recognised for our unique contribution to the country's operatic landscape, Victorian Opera proudly became an Australian Major Performing Arts company in 2019. In 2021 we transitioned to the newly formed National Performing Arts Partnership Framework (NPAPF).

As the world went into lockdown, we got to work, sharing our passion far and wide with a range of web series and online performances. Returning home to the stage, we embrace the new normal and will continue to perform in Victoria's finest theatres and concert halls to give our audiences the best possible and safest experience.

Be it live or online, Victorian Opera is here to inspire you.



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