THE GRUMPIEST BOY IN THE WORLD
Victorian Opera respectfully acknowledges the people of the Kulin Nation on whose unceded lands we honour the continuation of the oldest music practice in the world.
VICTORIAN OPERA PRESENTS

THE GRUMPIEST BOY IN THE WORLD

FULLY-STAGED OPERA IN ONE ACT
Based on the children’s book of the same name

Composer Joseph Twist   Librettist Finegan Kruckemeyer

CREATIVES

Conductor Richard Mills
Director Elizabeth Hill-Cooper
Set Designer Louisa Fitzgerald
Costume Designer Jodi Hope
Lighting Designer Peter Darby
Sound Designer Sam Moxham

CAST

Zachary
Daniel Szesiong Todd (時雄)
& Joshua Morton-Galea
Mum
Saskia Mascitti
Dad
Noah Straughan
Scientist 1
Chloe James
Scientist 2
Nicholas Beecher
Giant
James Billson

Girl
Breanna Stuart
Bird
Lisette Bolton
Grump 1
Maria Woolford
Grump 2
Hartley Trusler
Squirrel Faced Monkey
Amanda Hargreaves

CHORUS

Qiulian Axtens, Genevieve Droppert, Sofia Imperatore, Jesse Linke, Metehan Pektas, Mitchell Sanders, Cen Wei, Felicia Zangari, Isaac Burgess, Declan Farr, Zhuoyang Li, Nicholas Christie

Victorian Opera Chamber Orchestra


23 – 24 JUNE
ARTS CENTRE MELBOURNE, PLAYHOUSE
60 minutes, no interval
Sung in English
Welcome to this delightful work, *The Grumpiest Boy in the World*, adapted from celebrated children's storyteller Finegan Kruckemeyer's book of the same name and Joe Twist's magical score. Our hero, Zachary Bridgling, leads us through a fantasy world of creatures and characters who just want to share a likeness with somebody else. Victorian Opera commissioned this work in 2015 and it's with great delight that we share another retelling of it here for our audiences.

This annual presentation of our family offering is one very close to my heart. We work with the University of Melbourne students studying Opera, and are always grateful to Jane Davidson for enabling the students to work with our company. This year we have added two highly skilled design students, Louisa Fitzgerald and Jodi Hope, to work with us on the set and costume designs. This combination, along with long time colleague Peter Darby as Lighting Designer, makes for a wonderful combination of energy, creativity and collaboration. Working with these emerging artists is always joyous. I am constantly amazed at the skills and resilience they demonstrate in their respective artforms, and feel buoyed at the prospect of our artistic future here in Australia. We sincerely hope you enjoy the work all our contributors have made to realise this wonderful tale.

As always, Victorian Opera could not present these works without the support of many across our network. Firstly, I would like to thank the Victorian Opera staff and board, who work tirelessly at the highest level on every production no matter how small or large it may be. We are truly blessed and always grateful. Secondly, our funding partners The Australia Council for the Arts, the State Government of Victoria through Creative Victoria and the Robert Salzer Foundation. The Salzer Foundation has been supporting Victorian Opera since our inception. We are indebted to your vision for our company.

And finally our patrons, in particular our Leadership Syndicate and Artistic Directors’ Circle and all members from Platinum to Bronze, the trusts and foundations and corporate sponsors. It never ceases to humble us at the generosity and willingness to assist Victorian Opera in reimagining the potential of opera and musical theatre for everyone. If you think you know opera, think again! Come as you are and enjoy.

ELIZABETH HILL-COOPER
Victorian Opera CEO and Director
This charming chamber opera was commissioned by Victorian Opera several years ago. Since that auspicious first season in 2015, composer Joe Twist has gone on to be one of the most important new voices in Australian music. His music is a major contribution to the success of the ABC’s *Bluey*, and his outstanding work *Watershed* – an oratorio commissioned for the 2022 Adelaide Festival – has enjoyed universal critical acclaim and audience enthusiasm.

This opera is a story of a young person’s search for identity and meaning, which leads us through fabulous landscapes and creatures to a reaffirmation of the uniqueness of every person and their capacity to be extraordinary through making the best of the circumstances that life presents. The music has great integrity in its deceptive simplicity – the beautifully wrought text is set with skill and refinement – as we are taken on a quirky journey of self-discovery.

This presentation also celebrates Victorian Opera’s collaboration with the University of Melbourne in mentoring and training young singers. These young performers, who have all successfully auditioned for their roles, are given the experience of the level of professional practice required by opera singers under the daily guidance of expert music and production staff. This is an important part of the mission of Victorian Opera and its commitment to the next generation of performers, who never fail to surprise and delight us with their talents, dedication and abilities.

**RICHARD MILLS**  
Artistic Director, Conductor
It's always a wonderful thing to experience your words being brought to life onstage.

Before entering the rehearsal room, they sit there in printed form, polite and quiet and waiting – before that joyous moment when an actor lifts them off the page and breathes life into them. Suddenly that text is something to be shouted or whispered, to be passed quietly between friends or thrown across a theatre in anger. That transformation, from words scribbled down to words picked up, is a pleasure.

But there is another, even more magical, transformation that I’ve been able to experience from time to time – and this is to watch a line of dialogue being rolled around the wonderful, labyrinthine mind of a composer, to find it married with just the right notes and, finally, to hear it delivered (in all its operatic glory) by a masterful singer.

So it went with this project, as a story that began life as a play in England now switches costume and re-enters the theatre as an opera in Australia. Richard Mills and Elizabeth Hill-Cooper first sowed the seed with the prescience and bravery that comes with great artistic directorship. They invited me to embark on a new adventure, as partnered with brilliant composer Joe Twist (a name crying out to become a character in a future play!).

This team recognized the potential for a Grumpiest Boy spoken to become a Grumpiest Boy sung, and the musical world that Joe then crafted has an energy all its own – it is a score that, to this layman’s ear, is playful and textured and very hard to be grumpy about at all. Jodi Hope’s costume designs (literally) complete the picture, fantastical worlds made tangible, the peculiar now rendered wonderfully familiar.
The kaleidoscope musical language of *The Grumpiest Boy in the World* reflects Zachary's journey to strange landscapes, his encounters with fantastical characters, his boundless imagination and his many fits of anger. Circus music, jazz, chaotic cadenzas, powerful crescendos and colourful orchestral flourishes are contrasted with moments of great triumph and introspective pathos as Zachary's journey of self-discovery unfolds. Melodies and musical motifs create unity throughout the ever-changing musical journey, reflecting Zachary's struggle to be anything but 'middling' and his relationship with the characters around him. Zachary sings two slow, simple melodies, the first of which is associated with moments of sadness and despair, first heard with the words “stuck on the fridge door is all I can wish for.”

The second theme represents Zachary's sense of hope and optimism, first heard as he embarks upon his magical journey with “I launch into my travels, searching for something strange.” These two themes are developed and intertwined throughout, most notably during Zachary's sad ‘arioso’: “As the world turns and the seasons pass.” These melodies of pathos are contrasted with faster, more complex, chromatic musical motifs which represent Zachary's limitless imagination and his many grumpy tantrums.

I'm overjoyed and delighted that this show is getting another go thanks to so much talent and passion connected to the wonderful folks at Victorian Opera.

JOSEPH TWIST
Composer
PRODUCTION

PRODUCTION TEAM

Stage Manager
Stephanie Grima

Assistant Stage Manager
Thor Bjorklund Dam

Assistant Company Manager
Emma Mosley

Wardrobe Supervisor
Vannessa Roberts

Orchestra Manager
Noah Chrapot

MUSIC STAFF

Principal Repetiteur
Jacob Abela

Repetiteurs
Phoebe Briggs
Tom Griffiths

MELBOURNE OPERA CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Violin 1
Monica Curro

Violin 2
Jennifer Kirsner

Viola
Eunise Cheng

Cello
Nils Hobiger

Bass
Nic Synot

Clarinet
Natasha Fearnside

Trumpet
Callum G’Froerer

Percussion
Arwen Johnston

Piano
Jacob Abela

SEASON STAFF COSTUMIERS

Frances Brunton
Merideth Clements
Jemma Eton
Justine Haselton
Jacinda Hill
Emma Ikin
Carla Noto
Vannessa Roberts
Nicole Serjeant
Rebecca Silveira

WIG BUILD, WIGS & MAKEUP

Charlotte Webb

DRESSERS & COSTUME MAINTENANCE

Arts Centre Melbourne staff
5Stream
Imported Theatre Fabrics
Zachary Briddling has great plans for himself. When he draws, he imagines himself a wonderful, terrible king: riding a lion down the road, with a crown as high as the sky! But when the crayons go away, he's forced to admit it's not like that. Because Zachary (aged 8 years, 4 months, and living in the 9th house on 10th Street, with one mother and one father) is a strange one. What is extraordinary about the boy is his extra ordinariness. Zachary Briddling... is awfully middling.

He roars with the roar of a child who wishes to be at least a little bit amazing, at something. 'My normalness is killing me, Mother!' shouts the boy, throwing crayons. She reminds him he is only normal here, though he would be very different in strange places filled with hairy things, flying things, giant things and tiny things.

Zachary realises he would be, and sets off with a backpack to the lands of giants, and monsters, and talking birds. As he meets these strange creatures, they realise how alike they are to Zachary. He becomes even grumpier that they can't see how different he actually is.

Zachary storms off, sure his fate is sealed – Zachary Briddling is as middling, and average, and normal, even more than he thought. There is not a single thing that makes him special.

Until he arrives in Grumptown, a land filled with the most annoyed and annoying population of people ever. Zachary listens to their grumping... and laughs. The locals challenge him to a ‘grumpoff’ and, with the help of his giant and hairy and tiny friends met along the way, he wins it all.

Zachary Briddling discovers he is truly the King of the Grumps! Superbly excited with himself, Zachary rides home on his lion, throws his crown on the floor, and goes into his room... slamming the door as hard as he can.
CREATIVE TEAM

JOSEPH TWIST
Composer

 Composer/arranger straddles film music and concert music arenas, including work on the successful animated series *Bluey*, as well as arrangements and orchestrations for many major motion pictures produced in Hollywood. He has created music for many renowned international artists and ensembles such as Moby and The Wiggles, and his work has been performed and recorded by the world's greatest orchestras, including collaborations with The Los Angeles Philharmonic, The Hollywood Scoring Orchestra and all major Symphony Orchestras in Australia.

Twist has a wealth of experience in choral music as both a singer and composer, receiving numerous commissions and performances of his music from choirs in Australia and around the world, including The Choir of Trinity College Cambridge, Chanticleer, Voces8, The Idea Of North and many others.

Twist received critical acclaim for his landmark LGBTQIA rights work *Watershed: The Death of Dr Duncan* for the 2022 Adelaide Festival.

FINEGAN KRUCKEMEYER
Librettist

Finegan has had 104 plays performed on six continents and in eight languages. His work has enjoyed seasons in over 200 international festivals, and in 2018 he was the most-produced playwright of original children's theatre in the US.

He and his work have received 42 awards, including the Mickey Miners Lifetime Achievement Award for International Theatre for Young Audiences, the David Williamson Prize for Excellence in Australian Playwriting, eight Australian Writers’ Guild Awards and an inaugural Sidney Myer Fellowship. He has spoken at conferences in ten countries, with papers published and works studied at many international universities.

Seven of his plays have been published by Currency Press, including an anthology of his works, *For We The Young*. His first novel will be published in 2024.

Finegan is committed to making strong and respectful work for young people, which acknowledges them as astute audience members outside the plays, and worthy subjects within.
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’s posts have included Artistic Director of both West Australian Opera and the Adelaide Chamber Orchestra, Director of the Australian Music Project for Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, and Musica Viva’s Composer of the Year. His recording of Franz Waxman’s film music with the QSO was awarded the Preis der Deutschen Schallplatten Kritik in 1992.

This year, Richard conducts Glimpses and Dialogues from Galileo at Perth Festival, La Cenerentola, The Grumpiest Boy in the World and the first performances of his new opera, Galileo. Recent highlights include Elektra, Butterfly Lovers (Mills) and La Cenerentola for Victorian Opera, Voss for State Opera South Australia, and the world premiere of his Christmas oratorio Nativity with Adelaide Symphony Orchestra.

Elizabeth began her career as a classical ballet dancer with West Australian Ballet. Moving into choreography and directing, she discovered her love of opera. She has created or restaged productions for several state opera companies and Opera Australia. Her credits include Fledermaus, The Gypsy Princess, The Tales of Hoffmann, My Fair Lady, The Pirates of Penzance, Rusalka, Lakme and Arabella. Elizabeth regularly collaborates with Stuart Maunder and Roger Kirk.

Joining Victorian Opera in 2012, Elizabeth has directed mainstage productions such as Pelleas and Melisande and The Pearl Fishers, and was the company’s Executive Producer and Artistic Associate from 2014–2019. She was appointed Victorian Opera’s CEO in May 2019.

Louisa is a set and costume designer for theatre, opera and dance. As a skilled maker, Louisa uses her lifelong love of art, history and textiles to influence how she designs for performance. Originally from Sydney, where she earned a Bachelor of Design from UNSW, she is currently completing a Master of Production Design at VCA.

Recent credits include Production and Costume Design for Goodbye Mr Wilde (2022) and Set Design for Noises Off! (2022). In 2022 Louisa was awarded the Union Theatre Award for Outstanding Set Design.

Louisa has also worked as a design educator at Loreto College Kirribilli and at Queen’s College, the University of Melbourne.
Jodi is a Costume, Set and Textile Designer for stage. Her background in fine art and textiles underpins her approach to visual storytelling, expressed through a sensitivity to colour, composition and character.

She is a two-time Green Room nominee in Costume Design for Musical Theatre and a recipient of the Trina Parker Scholarship for postgraduate study in Production Design at Victorian College of the Arts.

Her recent costume design credits include *tick, tick...BOOM!* (Storeyboard Entertainment), *Next to Normal* (James Terry Collective), *Into the Woods* (Watch This), *Telling Tales* (Melbourne Shakespeare Company) and *Ghost Quartet* (Antipodes Theatre Company).

Peter is a Green Room Award nominated Lighting Designer, Head Electrician and Programmer.

Peter is a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts, having studied under the late John Comedow. Although trained in lighting design, Peter has worked in all facets of the arts, spanning such jobs as Production Manager, Lighting Designer, Lighting Programmer, AV Design, Sound Operator, Video production and Head Electrician. Having spent 12 years at Victorian Opera, personally working on more than 50 productions, Peter is currently serving as the Manager, Lighting at Arts Centre Melbourne.


Sam Moxham is a seasoned sound engineer with extensive experience in front-of-house mixing, sound design, broadcasting, recording and post-production.

He frequently collaborates with Australia’s major Arts Organisations, including the Australian Ballet, Opera Australia and Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

After his successful contributions to the 2022 seasons of *The Selfish Giant* and *Happy End*, and the 2023 season of *Melbourne, Cheremushki*, Sam returns to Victorian Opera as sound designer for *The Grumpiest Boy in the World.*
Chinese-Australian tenor Daniel Szesiong Todd (時雄) was a member of Victorian Opera’s Developing Artist Program before travelling to Germany to join the Hamburg State Opera, where he sang over 30 roles. He has performed across Europe and Asia, with repertoire encompassing traditional opera, new music, baroque and crossover.

Since returning to Australia, Daniel has performed extensively with Opera Australia, Victorian Opera, Australian Contemporary Opera Co and Forest Collective, and recently toured the country with Rogers & Hammerstein’s Cinderella for Opera Australia.

Daniel holds a Master of Music from the University of Melbourne, as well as bachelor degrees in music and law.

Joshua is a classical singer based in the western suburbs of Melbourne, and began performing at age seven in his school’s production of The Wizard of Oz. He is currently finalising his MMus in Opera Performance, at the Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne.

Joshua’s recent credits include Snow in Victorian Opera’s The Selfish Giant (2022), and Lysander in MCM’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream (2022).

Joshua is excited to bring Zachary’s imaginary world to life!

Saskia Mascitti first started singing under the guidance of Angela Wasley (2008). She has trained and performed with YVM (2012-15), VOYCE (2016-21), OSA (2016-20), Melbourne Bach Choir (2020-), and St John’s (2022-).

She is currently undertaking a Master of Music at Melbourne University under Roxane Hislop. This is her third production of The Grumpiest Boy in the World with Victorian Opera (2015, 2021) and she is honoured to return as Mum. This silly little opera is what truly sparked her love for performing.
Chloe James is an emerging mezzo-soprano, currently studying a Master of Music (Opera Performance) at the Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne. She is a seasoned performer with sixteen years of dance experience and a fierce love for songwriting and poetry. Chloe’s past performances include the Opera Bytes series (2020), Die Freunde von Salamanka (2021), The Grumpiest Boy in the World (2021), A Midsummer Night’s Dream (2022), Il Mago di Oz (2022), and Melbourne, Cheremushki (2023).

Nicholas Beecher is a musician and teacher originally from Leeton, NSW and is studying a Master of Music (Opera Performance) at the Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne. His recent performances include Barabashkin in Melbourne, Cheremushki (2023) and Demetrius in A Midsummer Night’s Dream (2022).

During spare time, Nicholas looks after his two greyhounds through walks, treats and zoomies. He is looking forward to wearing a lab coat and portraying his nerdiest persona as Scientist 2.

Noah Straughan is a bass-baritone from Melbourne in his first year of the Master of Music (Opera Performance). Noah recently performed in Victorian Opera’s Melbourne, Cheremushki (2023) and Orpheus in the Underworld (2022). He also played Peter Quince in Britten’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream (2022) with the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music.

Noah is passionate about opera and its ability to move its audiences through music, which makes him especially excited for this production.

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Noah Straughan
Dad

Chloe James
Scientist 1

Nicholas Beecher
Scientist 2 (Dad cover)
Breanna Stuart is a soprano based in Melbourne, Australia. In 2022, Breanna made her professional debut in the role of Ianthe in Lyric Opera of Melbourne's production of Iphis. Her other recent theatre credits include First Fairy/Chorus in The Selfish Giant (Victorian Opera), and Hippolyta/Cobweb in A Midsummer Night's Dream (Melbourne University). Breanna is also a 2023/24 ACOCo Resident Emerging Artist, and will be performing the roles of Foreign Woman/Magda in their production of Menotti's The Consul.

Wagga Wagga-born soprano Lisette Bolton is a Masters student at the University of Melbourne and an alumna of Opera Australia’s Regional Student Scholarship program, the Young Songmakers Development Program and Opera Scholars Australia. She has performed with Victorian Opera, Australian International Productions, the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music and the Albury Chamber Music Festival. Her performance in Lyric Opera's Fly (2020) and IOpera’s The Emperor of Atlantis (2022) saw her nominated for two Green Room Awards.

Bass-baritone James Billson is currently pursuing his Master of Music degree at Melbourne University under the guidance of Jane Davidson and Stephen Grant. His journey began with the violin and guitar before his discovery of a passion for singing, which he first explored in Melbourne Grammar School’s chapel choir.

So far, James has participated in several community and professional music projects, including the ICAC production of Dogfight and the Consort of the Moon project (formerly Echolalia) which is returning for this year’s RISING festival. James made his operatic debut in the University's production of Britten’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream last year, and has since secured a spot in Melbourne Opera’s Götterdämmerung chorus.
Maria Woolford has recently moved from sunny Brisbane to complete a Master of Music (Opera Performance) at the University of Melbourne. During her studies, Maria has performed title roles in Lakmé (2017), Little Women (2018), das Rheingold (2018), Norma (2021), Baby Doe (2021) and Suor Angelica (2022). Maria has sung in the choruses of a variety of operas and oratorios, as well as the alto solo in Bruckner’s Requiem (2016), and Beethoven’s 9th Symphony (2022). Maria loves exploring Melbourne’s cafe and bookstore culture and is very excited to be joining Victorian Opera for The Grumpiest Boy in the World.

Hartley is currently completing his Master of Music (Opera Performance) at the University of Melbourne, studying singing with Patricia Price. Hartley’s previous performances include the roles of Lysander in A Midsummer Night’s Dream (2022), Pluto in Orpheus in the Underworld (2020), Eisenstein in Die Fledermaus (2019), and ensemble in Victorian Opera’s The Selfish Giant (2022). Prior to commencing his vocal training, Hartley studied classical ballet at the WA Conservatoire of Classical Ballet. Outside of singing, Hartley likes to bake bread and ride his motorbike.

Amanda is currently in her final year of the Master of Music (Opera Performance) course at the University of Melbourne. Roles include the spoken role of Titania in Purcell’s The Fairy Queen (2022) and La Fortuna/Damigella in Monteverdi’s L’incoronazione di Poppea (2021) for the Conservatorium. She covered the principal role of Olivia in Victorian Opera’s production of Schubert’s Friends of Salamanca (2021). Other roles studied include Despina in Mozart’s Così Fan Tutte. Amanda loves animals, even the ‘scary’ ones like great white sharks and huntsman spiders!
CHORUS

QIULIAN AXTENS
(Scientist 1 Cover)

ISAAC BURGESS

NICHOLAS CHRISTIE

GENEVIEVE DROPPERT
(Mum Cover)

DECLAN FARR

SOFIA IMPERATORE
(Bird Cover)

ZHUOYANG LI

JESSE LINKE
(Squirrel Faced Monkey and Grump 1 Cover)

METEHAN PEKTAS
MITCHELL SANDERS

CEN WEI
(Grump 2 cover)

FELICIA ZANGARI
OUR TEAM

FOUNDING MUSIC DIRECTOR
The late Richard Gill AO

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VICTORIAN OPERA SEASON 2023
THE GRUMPIEST BOY IN THE WORLD

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ELEVATE YOUR TRAVEL WITH AN EXTRA DOSE OF FRENCH LUXURY
SOFITEL MELBOURNE ON COLLINS
REIMAGINING THE POTENTIAL OF OPERA AND MUSICAL THEATRE, FOR EVERYONE.

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 35 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.

@VictorianOpera  #VictorianOpera
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Thomas Sykes
Hugh Taylor AC & Elizabeth Dax AM
Christina Turner
Raymond Wilkinson
In memory of Helen Robertson
In memory of Ann Fakhry
Secret Admirers (11)

**BEQUESTORS**

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Lesley Bawden
Frank & Danielle Chamberlin
Peter Hourigan
Len de Kievit and the late Graeme Bawden
Jane Kunstler
Richard Laslett & Colin Gunther
Gregory J Reinhardt AM
Lorraine Weiner & Geoffrey Blick
Tony Wildman & Robert Gibbs
Secret Admirers (6)

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