

Performance Partner



VICTORIAN
OPERA



DEBORAH CHEETHAM FRAILLON AO

PARRWANG LIFTS THE SKY

VICTORIAN OPERA PRESENTS

PARRWANG LIFTS THE SKY

FAMILY SHOW

CREATIVES

Conductor Aaron Wyatt	Cultural Scenic Design Billy-Jay O'Toole
Director Elizabeth Hill-Cooper	Set & Costume Designer Mel Serjeant
Cultural Textile Design	Lighting Designer Peter Darby
Dr Deanne Gilson Wadawurrung Elder	Sound Designer / Engineer Samuel Moxham

CAST

Parrwang Sarah Prestwidge, Lisette Bolton	Mr. Waa Nicholas Beecher, Mitchell Sanders
Gorgany Michaela Cadwgan*, Sofia Imperatore	Mrs. Waa Chloe James, Saskia Mascitti
Koki Douglas Kelly**, Michtell Sanders	Tjatjarrang Chloe Taylor, Millicent Brake
Bunjil James Billson, Isaac Burgess	

CHORUS

Erin Absalom, Sarah Amos, Qiulian Axtens, Millicent Brake, Ashley Chua, Harriet Du Pont, Sofia Imperatore, Stephanie Macindoe, Tessa McKenna, Metahan Pektas, Noah Straughan, Chloe Taylor, Maria Woolford

COVERS

Harriet Du Pont, Mitchell Sanders, Noah Straughan, Maria Woolford

ORCHESTRA

Victorian Opera Chamber Orchestra

Performance Partner



short black
opera

In association with

**Melbourne Conservatorium of
Music, University of Melbourne**

Relaxed Performance Supported by

**Marian & E H Flack Trust
William Angliss Charitable Trust**

Generously Supported By

Jane Hemstrich OA

**Michaela Cadwgan is proudly supported by Mary Davidson & the family of the late Frederick R Davidson AM*

*** Douglas Kelly is proudly supported by Dr Michael Stubbs and Malcolm Roberts*

10 – 18 MAY

MALTHOUSE, MERLYN THEATRE

50 minutes, with no interval
Sung in English

Victorian Opera respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the unceded land on which we work and live: the people of the Eastern Kulin Nation. We acknowledge these original owners and custodians of the lands and waterways and their enduring cultural practices of caring for Country. We pay respect to their Elders past and present.

CEO/DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Welcome to this production of Deborah Cheetham Frailon's opera, *Parrwang Lifts the Sky*. The work, first commissioned by Victorian Opera and presented in collaboration with Short Black Opera, was scheduled for performances in 2021. Not to be thwarted by the pandemic lockdowns, we forged ahead and created a digital recording of the work that entertained thousands of school children forced into home schooling during that time. To have the opportunity to present it again in full theatre presentation is a gift we appreciate deeply.

This creation story from Wadawurrung Country tells the story of two adventurous young people who want to raise the darkness across their world, and how a plucky young parrwang (magpie) helps them to lift the sky. It's a delight, the characters are images from our world today, and the timeless story shows all that determination and working together can achieve much.

In this presentation of the work we welcome Australian soprano Sarah Prestwidge, now residing in London, to perform the title role of Parrwang. She is joined by Victorian Opera Prize winners for 2024 in Michaela Cadwgan and Douglas Kelly, ably supported by performers from University of Melbourne's Masters in Music (opera performance). At the musical helm, Aaron Wyatt, who is Artistic Director of Short Black Opera's Ensemble Dutala, joins Victorian Opera for the first time and brings his expert knowledge of this delightful score.

Working with Deborah on this opera has been

a highlight of my directing career. Her care, expertise and continuing passion to share the stories of the First People will always be a treasured time for me. To be one of many who benefit from her generosity of spirit is another gift I value deeply.

As always, I wish to thank our funding partners of State Government of Victoria through Creative Victoria, Creative Australia and the Robert Salzer Foundation. We have many passionate patrons who support the development of young people both on the stage and in the audience. Projects such as these make perfect sense and we are delighted to present this gem of an opera for you and your extended family.



ELIZABETH HILL-COOPER
Victorian Opera CEO

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

The most powerful tool an opera company possesses is the magical moment when the lights go down, the orchestra begins, the curtain rises. Each year we give that first experience to school children from every possible diverse background. In 2024 we are proud to present Deborah Cheetham Frailon's joyous retelling of a First Nation creation story, a story of Wadawurrung Country: *Parrwang Lifts the Sky*.

This opera, produced in association with Short Black Opera, was previously premiered 'on-line' in VO's Covid-affected 2021 season. We are proud to finally be able to present this powerful story 'live, onstage' so a whole new audience can finally experience this piece, an opera that celebrates our rich multicultural heritage, and recognises that it is our greatest source of strength.

The 2021 production of *Parrwang Lifts the Sky*, a collaboration between Victorian Opera and Short Black Opera, was the first of its kind in Australia and provided each member of the cast and creative team with an opportunity to grow in their understanding of traditional knowledge and the importance of culture, language and story. By virtue of this collaboration, Victorian Opera demonstrates a desire to move forward the process of Reconciliation in a most beautiful, practical and accessible way, creating opportunities for audiences of all ages to witness the powerful result that comes from showcasing First Nations stories through the medium of opera.

Parrwang Lifts the Sky builds on Victorian Opera's proud history of nurturing and premiering new Australian works, including those by First Nations artists. It is an important and joyous piece, and the perfect vehicle for one and all to get their first taste of opera.



STUART MAUNDER
Artistic Director

SYNOPSIS

Parrwang Lifts the Sky is based on a Wadawurrung creation story about the first sunrise. The Wadawurrung people are from western Victoria in the area from Geelong to Ballarat.

In this story, Parrwang the magpie is preparing for a visit from her cousin Gorgnany when she is interrupted by two human children who have climbed her tree.

The humans have been living on the ground, which is covered in darkness. They are amazed by the light up in the treetops as they can see all the wonderful

colours and feel the breeze. After hearing this from her new friends, Parrwang works to convince the Great Council of Birds, led by Bunjil the Eagle, to lift the veil of darkness from the land. But first she has to convince her cousin and Mr and Mrs Waa, the crows, that the humans can be trusted to share and care for Country.

To the Wadawurrung people, this led to the first sunrise and helped explain the beautiful birdsong sung by magpies at dawn.



Photo credit: Mel Serjeant
Victorian Opera's 2021 production of *Parrwang Lifts the Sky*

PRODUCTION

PRODUCTION TEAM

Stage Manager
Lucie Sutherland
Assistant Stage Manager
Claudia Howarth
Mechanist
Tiernan Maclaren
Alex Donnelly
Costume Manager
Mel Serjeant
Lighting Technician
Jack Willis-Hall
Radio Microphone Technician
Angus Beaumont
Audio Describer
Nilgun Guven (Vitae Veritas)
Live Stream Audio Engineer
Daniel O'Callaghan

MUSIC STAFF

Head of Music
Phoebe Briggs
Repetiteur
Tom Griffiths

SEASON STAFF

Head Dresser
Paul Smith
Hair
Kym McConville
Makeup
Drew-Elizabeth Johnstone
Debbie Müller

Costumiers
Lara Barwick
Meredith Clements
Emma Ikin
Carla Noto
Amelia Peace
Nicole Serjeant
Xander Reichard
Vannessa Roberts
Becky Silveira

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Monitor City
Imported Theatre
Fabrics
LexAV
5Stream
Adele Conlin, AAA
Audio Engineer

ORCHESTRA

Victorian Opera
Chamber Orchestra

Orchestra Manager
Jenny Le
Violin I
Jaso Sasaki
Violin II
Cameron Jamieson
Viola
Eunise Cheng
Cello
Nils Hobiger
Double Bass
Nic Synot
Flute / Piccolo
Dom Chaseling

Flute
Nichaud Munday
Oboe/ Cor Anglais
Ben Opie
Clarinet/ Bass Clarinet
Andrew Fong
Bassoon
Matthew Angus
French Horn
Evgeny Chebykin
Percussion
Kaylie Melville
Piano
James Herbert*
Julian Wade*

*University of Melbourne
Masters Students

CREATIVE TEAM



**DEBORAH CHEETHAM
FRAILLON AO**

Composer and Librettist

Deborah Cheetham Fraillon AO (Yorta Yorta/Yuin), soprano and composer, is a respected human rights advocate and recognised thought leader on the importance of cultural authority in the Art Music space. Throughout a long and distinguished career, Deborah has championed the voice and visibility of classically trained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island musicians through her achievements as composer, performer and artistic director of Australia's national First Nations Opera Company, Short Black Opera (est. 2009), and Director of Dhungala Children's Choir (est. 2008).

In 2019 Cheetham Fraillon established the One Day in January project, designed to develop and nurture Indigenous orchestral musicians. From this emerged Ensemble Dutala, Australia's first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Chamber Ensemble, which has led to the increased visibility and status of First Nations orchestral musicians in Australia.

As a composer, Cheetham Fraillon's list of commissions for major ensembles and companies include works for the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, Australian String Quartet, West Australian Symphony Orchestra String Quartet, Rubiks Collective, Melbourne Ensemble, The ABC, The Sydney Philharmonia, Plexus Collective, Flinders Quartet, Goldner Quartet, The Australian Ballet, Victorian Opera, The MPavilion Project, Chineke (UK) and Hawai'i Symphony.

Cheetham Fraillon's landmark compositions include Australia's first Indigenous operas *Pecan Summer* (2010) and *Parrwang Lifts the Sky* (2020), *Eumeralla, a war requiem for peace* (2018) and the ongoing multi-layered, multi-lingual chamber music series *Woven Song* (2018).

Deborah Cheetham Fraillon's career and achievements have been celebrated with a number of significant awards and commendations including the Don Banks Music Award (2023), Queensland Government - Australian Women in Music Lifetime Achievement Awards (2022), the JC Williamson Lifetime Achievement Award (2021) and the Sir Bernard Heinze Memorial Award for service to music and an Honorary Doctorate from the University of South Australia (2018). In the 2014 Queen's Birthday Honours List, Deborah was appointed as an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO), for distinguished service to the performing arts as an opera singer, composer and artistic director, to the development of Indigenous artists, and to innovation in performance, and in 2022 she was appointed as a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities (FAHA).

In 2021 Deborah Cheetham Fraillon began a five year appointment as MSO First Nations Creative Chair, and in 2023 was appointed the inaugural Elizabeth Todd Chair of Vocal Studies at The Sydney Conservatorium of Music at the University of Sydney.



AARON WYATT

Conductor

Aaron is a violist, violinist, conductor, composer, programmer and academic. Originally from Perth, he spent many years as a regular casual with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra before moving to Melbourne to take up an assistant lecturer position at Monash. A member of the Decibel New Music Ensemble, he also develops their animated graphic notation app, the Decibel ScorePlayer. In 2021 he became the first Indigenous Australian to conduct a state symphony orchestra in concert, and has since gone on to have engagements with the Melbourne, Adelaide, and Sydney Symphony Orchestras, as well as being the artistic director of Ensemble Dutala.



ELIZABETH HILL-COOPER

Director

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*, *Lakmé* 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.



DR DEANNE GILSON
WADAWURRUNG ELDER
Cultural Textile Design

Dr. Deanne Gilson is a Proud Wadawurrung woman living on her ancestral Country of Ballarat which is located in Australia. Her award-winning multi-disciplinary art practice has spanned forty years full time creating through painting, clay (sculptural installation), fashion & textile design, photography, drawing and recently being included as an upcoming Blak Jewellery Designer.

Gibson celebrates her continued living culture through art and design that revives traditional marks used by Wadawurrung family, contemporary ceremonial business and includes oral stories like her Creation Story. She depicts many indigenous plants, trees, birds, often painting endangered species to highlight the importance of taking care of the land and all living things. Working with the notion that time is traversed and all is connected through layers of Dja (Country), from the Cosmos, to Sky to Under Country. Alongside the issues faced by Aboriginal women stemming from the white male and female colonial gaze.

Gilson highlights the beauty of Dja through use of natural ochres sourced by herself on Wadawurrung Dja. While at the same time challenging colonial patriarchal views, including those expressed in the arts and crafts of early Australia. Her contemporary art practice is an attempt to revive and regain the presence of cultural identity, but also to play a deeper role in preserving and highlighting cultural practices and symbology, thereby awakening culture once again.

Gibson states that "My practice aims to demonstrate the way in which contemporary Aboriginal women's art and business, including sacred and spiritual aspects, is evolving in response to the current social and political environment. We are reclaiming, reinvigorating, teaching our children, and unravelling the trauma caused by the invasion of our Country." Her artwork has recently been collected by the Koorie Heritage Trust and the National Gallery of Victoria, and held in many other public and private collections throughout the world.

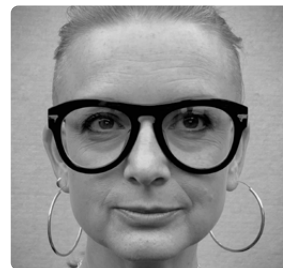


BILLY-JAY O'TOOLE
Cultural Scenic Design

My name is Billy-Jay. I'm a proud Wadawurrung man residing on Wadawurrung country in Mount Duneed. I was born and raised on Wadawurrung country in Geelong. I am a recognised Traditional Owner and member of Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, where I work as a Cultural Heritage Representative. In 2019 I completed my Certificate 4 in Cultural Heritage Management, enabling me to strengthen my cultural commitment to my country and community whilst also strengthening my cultural connection to family and country.

Working on my country reignited my spirit of painting, walking country and learning from country in my Field Officer role, and I now walk in my gifting of storytelling through paint, of which I have created many stories of country. I am on a journey learning language and I like to connect this to my paintings and stories of Wadawurrung Country. My art style is a contemporary style, always reflecting the stories and colours of Wadawurrung Country with the use of bright and earthy colours and symbols, as well as the elements of country, water, mountains, sun and coast – all of which give us what we need to live.

I have established a social media page for my art called Papul Art. "Papul" is the Wadawurrung language name for Ochre, which is traditionally used for painting by Wadawurrung people.



MEL SERJEANT
Set & Costume Designer

Mel is a multi-disciplinary practitioner with an arts career spanning 35 years. Mel's first arts practice was in dance, working in the Australian commercial dance industry in the 1980s-90s.

Expanding her creative practice, Mel studied Fashion Design at The National Arts School, Sydney Institute of Technology, majoring in fashion history, costume adaptation and textile design. Working in the arts for over 30 years, Mel has developed a formidable reputation for bridging the gap between fashion, costume and art that has seen her land diverse and challenging roles within film, live performance and the education sectors.

Mel also holds her Masters in Cross-Disciplinary Art & Design from the University of New South Wales. Exhibited and published internationally and throughout Australia, Mel has received numerous highly-acclaimed awards for her work.



PETER DARBY
Lighting Designer

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.

Victorian Opera repertoire: Lighting design credits include: *The Grumpest Boy in the World*, *Parrwang Lifts the Sky*, *Alice's Adventures in Operaland*, *Hansel & Gretel*, *The Magic Pudding*, *Rush Hour*, *The Play of Daniel*, 2011 Regional Tour Gala Performances, *Brundibár*, *The Cockatoos* and *The Little Sweep*.



SAMUEL MOXHAM
Sound Designer

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 and 2023 Victorian Opera seasons, he returns as Sound Designer for *Candide* and *Parrwang Lifts the Sky*.

CAST



SARAH PRESTWIDGE

Parrwang

Sarah Prestwidge, an acclaimed First Nations soprano, holds a Bachelor of Music Education from Sydney Conservatorium of Music and a Master of Music from Royal Northern College of Music with a full scholarship. Sarah also received the Marten Bequest Travelling Scholarship and won the Lady Gallegan London Award. Sarah joined the Opera Holland Park Chorus in 2022 and has returned to cover principal roles. Sarah also joined UK's National Opera Studio Diverse Voices programme in 2023/24. In the UK, Sarah has performed several roles including *Queen of the Night* (Mozart) *Susanna* (Mozart), *Controllor* (Dove), *Zerbinetta* (Strauss), *Rosina* (Rossini) and *Adele* (Strauss). As a proud Darug woman, Sarah is passionate about providing quality Music Education to First Nations people and has worked closely with Short Black Opera. Returning to Victorian Opera later this year, she will perform Yvette/Georgette/Lisette (Cover) in *La Rondine*. In 2024, Sarah is a Victorian Opera Emerging Artist.



MICHAELA CADWGAN

Gorgany

Michaela Cadwgan graduated in 2020 with First Class Honours in BMus from The New Zealand School of Music—Te Kōkī, Victoria University of Wellington (NZSM). She holds a BA in German and Italian and is an alumna of the New Zealand Opera School, where she received the Dame Sister Mary Leo Foundation Award. Her notable performances include *Suor Angelica* in the NZSM Puccini Double Bill, and collaborations with the NZ Symphony Orchestra, Opera Australia Orchestra, Auckland Philharmonia, and Orchestra Wellington. Michaela's accolades include first place in the Wellington Regional Aria Competition and runner-up at The Lockwood New Zealand Aria Finals. She also received the Saluzzo Opera Academy Scholarship, along with the Merenda Travel Prize and the MOST Audience Prize at the 2023 IFAC Handa ASC Finals.

In 2024, Michaela is performing *Julia Betram* in the New Zealand premiere of Jonathan Dove's *Mansfield Park* with New Zealand Opera, and is also a Victorian Opera Emerging Artist. Michaela is proudly supported by Mary Davidson & the family of the late Frederick R Davidson AM.



SOFIA IMPERATORE

Gorgany

Sofia Imperatore, soprano, in her second year of the Master of Music (Opera Performance) at the Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne. She was the grateful recipient of the Mona McCaughey scholarship for her Bachelor's studies. Recent credits include *Mrs Gobineau* (*The Medium*) and *Miss Pinkerton* (*The Old Maid and the Thief*) as well as the *Bird* (cover, *The Grumpiest Boy in the World* with Victorian Opera). Sofia is also a scholar with Opera Scholars Australia.

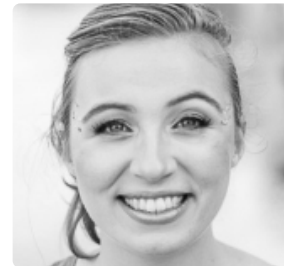


DOUGLAS KELLY

Koki

Douglas Kelly is an internationally performing tenor who has extensive experience in opera, oratorio and as a recitalist. He has been a prize-winner at the Australian Herald Sun Aria (2018), National Liederfest (2018, 2019), and is a current Emerging Artist with Victorian Opera. His performances in the operas *Ulmann's Kaiser von Atlantis* and *Kats-Chernin's Iphis* garnered Green Room Award nominations (Best Supporting Performance and Best Lead Performance in opera). His operatic credits include: Verdi's *Nabucco* (Ismaele), Puccini's *La Rondine* (Prunier), Williamson's *English Eccentrics* (Beau Brommel), Cesti's *Oronota* (Corindo), Monteverdi's *Il Ritorno D'Ulisse In Patria* (Anfinomo and Eurimaco), Mozart's *Le Nozze Di Figaro* (Basilio), Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* (Sellem), Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* (Gherardo), Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* (Aeneas) Jonathon Dove's *Mansfield Park* (Henry Crawford). He's been praised and described as 'charismatic in voice' and 'powerfully convincing' (Arts Hub), and 'A splendid Tenor' and 'suitably fresh and ardent of voice' (Limelight). His concert engagements include Berlioz's *L'Enfance Du Christ*, Britten's *War Requiem*, Haydn's *Creation* and Monteverdi's *Vespro Della Beata Vergine*.

Douglas has presented Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise* at the Melbourne Recital Centre, as well as presenting recitals of Wolf and Schumann cycles at fortyfivedownstairs, Tempo Rubato and in Baden Bei Wien, Austria, with the Schubert Institute. In masterclass and on stage, Douglas has worked with such musicians as Roger Vignoles, Helmut Deustch, Wolfram Rieger, Graham Johnson, Robert Holl, Elly Ameling and Andreas Schmidt. Douglas Kelly is proudly supported by Dr Michael Stubbs and Malcolm Roberts.



LISETTE BOLTON

Parrwang

Lisette Bolton, soprano, is completing her Masters at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, and is an alumna of scholarship programs with Opera Australia, Young Songmakers and Opera Scholars Australia. She was nominated for two Green Room Awards: Olive in *Lyric Opera's Fly* (2020) and the *Girl in IOpera's The Emperor of Atlantis* (2022). Other recent roles include *Laetitia* in *The Old Maid and the Thief* (2024) and *Bird* in *The Grumpiest Boy in the World* (2023), for Victorian Opera.



JAMES BILLSON

Bunjil

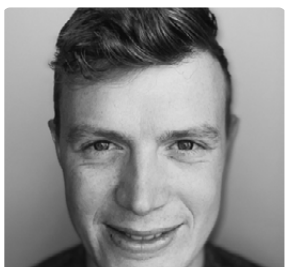
James Billson, baritone, is completing the Master of Music (Opera Performance) at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. Recent credits include David (*A Hand of Bridge*) and Papageno (*The Magic Flute*) both at MCM, The Giant (*The Grumpiest Boy in the World*, 2023, Victorian Opera), chorus in *Götterdämmerung* (2023, Melbourne Opera) and Starveling in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2022, MCM). He is recently a humble recipient of the Christchurch Choir bass choral scholarship.



ISAAC BURGESS

Bunjil

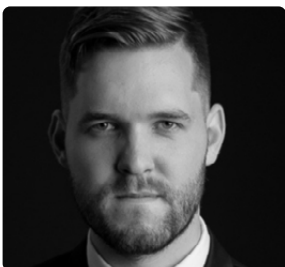
Isaac Burgess, baritone, is currently undertaking a Master of Music (Opera Performance). He has performed in both *The Selfish Giant* (2022) and *The Grumpiest Boy in the World* (2023) with Victorian Opera. He has featured in productions at the University of Melbourne, performing the roles of Mr Gobineau (*The Medium*) and David (*A Hand of Bridge*) in 2024, Starveling (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 2022) and was in the ensemble and Priest cover (*Die Zauberflöte*, 2023).



NICHOLAS BEECHER

Mr. Waa

Nicholas Beecher, baritone, is currently studying a Master of Music (Opera Performance) at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music after obtaining a Bachelor of Music from the Australian National University. Recent performances include Demetrius (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 2022), Barabashkin (*Melbourne, Cheremushki*, 2023) and Scientist 2 (*The Grumpiest Boy in the World*, 2023) both with Victorian Opera, Drozdov (*The Gilt-Edged Kid*, 2023), Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*, 2023), and Bob (*The Old Maid and the Thief*, 2024).



MITCHELL SANDERS

Mr. Waa/Koki

Mitchell Sanders, tenor, holds a Bachelor of Music (Honours) and is completing a Master of Opera Performance. In Opera Scholars Australia in 2020, he secured runner-up in the Aria Competition twice. Mitchell performed with the Australian Contemporary Opera Company in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (2022) and Victorian Opera in *The Grumpiest Boy in the World* (2023). He sang Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte* in 2023 and Bill (*A Hand of Bridge*) and Toby (*The Medium*) in 2024 through MCM.



CHLOE JAMES

Mrs. Waa

Chloe James, mezzo-soprano, is in her final year of her Masters in Opera Performance at the Melbourne Conservatorium, where she also completed her Bachelor's supported by scholarships from Mona McCaughey, Muriel Cheek and the Grace Durling Encouragement Award. Roles include Miss Todd (*The Old Maid and the Thief*) and Second Lady (*Die Zauberflöte*), and with Victorian Opera: Scientist 1 (*The Grumpiest Boy in the World*, Laura (*Die Freunde von Salamanka*), and Masha (cover, Melbourne, *Cheremushki*).



SASKIA MASCITTI

Mrs. Waa

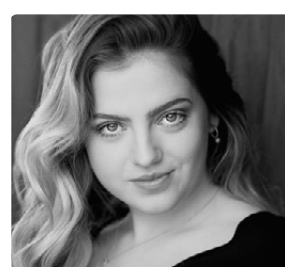
Saskia Mascitti, mezzo-soprano, is completing a Master of Music (Opera Performance) at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. Vocal training began through the Young Voices of Melbourne (2012-15) and Victorian Opera Youth Chorus Ensemble (2016-21). Principal roles include: Miss Todd (*The Old Maid and the Thief*), Gwen (*The Second Hurricane*), Mum (*The Grumpiest Boy in the World*, Victorian Opera) and Third Lady (*Die Zauberflöte*). Scholarships include Opera Scholars Australia, the Melbourne Bach Choir, and St John's Anglican Church.



CHLOE TAYLOR

Tjatjarrang

Chloe Taylor, soprano, has a Bachelor of Music Performance and is completing her Master of Music (Opera Performance) at Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. She was a member of the Victorian Opera Youth Chorus Ensemble (2018-2022), and performed *Il Mago di Oz* (Chorus, 2022). Musical theatre roles include Sophie Sheridan in *Mamma Mia!* and Phoebe D'Ysquith in *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*. She recently joined the Opera Scholars Australia cohort in 2024.



MILLICENT BRAKE

Tjatjarrang

Millicent Brake, soprano, migrated from the UK in 2018 to complete a Bachelor of Music (Classical Voice) at the Elder Conservatorium and is now studying a Masters of Music (Opera Performance) at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. She sang with the State Opera South Australia Pirates of Penzance (Chorus) in 2023 and was also Erste Knabe (*Die Zauberflöte*) in the Berlin Opera Academy. Millicent was vocal section winner of Young Virtuoso Awards, South Australia (2023).

CHORUS



ERIN ABSALOM

Erin Absalom, mezzo-soprano, is studying for her Master of Music (Opera Performance) at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. She has performed operatic roles such as Phoebe (*Yeomen of the Guard*) to Orlovsky (*Die Fledermaus*). Erin has featured as a soloist with the Australian Contemporary Opera Company, BK Opera, Gilbert & Sullivan Opera Victoria, The Savoy Opera Company Inc., and Cordelia's Potted Operas. She has also performed in the chorus with Melbourne Opera and Victorian Opera.



SARAH LOUISE AMOS

Sarah Louise Amos, soprano, recently started her Master of Music (Opera Performance) at the University of Melbourne and is the recipient of scholarships with Opera Scholars Australia, St Patrick's Cathedral, the Scots' Church and the Melbourne Bach Choir. Recent performance credits include *Il Mago di Oz* (Chorus) with Victorian Opera and *The Pirates of Penzance* (Mabel/Chorus) with GSOV. Sarah sings with the Australian Chamber Choir and is a dancer with Courtly Arts Performers of Victoria.



QIULIAN AXTENS

Qiulian Axtens, mezzo soprano, is finishing her Master of Music (Opera Performance), and holds Bachelor and Honours in Music, all from the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. She has performed in *The Friends of Salamanca* (Laura, cover), and *The Grumpiest Boy in the World* (Scientist 1, cover) both with Victorian Opera. She was Third Spirit in *The Magic Flute* and recently performed the roles of Mrs Gobineau (*The Medium*) and Sally (*A Hand of Bridge*).



ASHLEY CHUA

Ashley Chua, soprano, is originally from Singapore and holds a Bachelor of Music (Classical Voice) from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, and recently commenced her Master of Music (Opera Performance) at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. Her repertoire ranges from Sesto (*Giulio Cesare*) to Diana (*Orpheus in the Underworld*). She has also been a soloist with Freeze Frame Opera, New Opera Singapore, The Opera People and The Mad Scene.



HARRIET DU PONT

Harriet Du Pont, soprano is a graduate of classical voice at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, and is now studying for a Master of Music (Opera Performance) at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. She has performed roles such as Orlovsky in Strauss' *Die Fledermaus* and La Maestra delle Novizie in Puccini's *Suor Angelica*. Harriet was delighted to play Miss Pinkerton in the Conservatorium's recent production of Menotti's *The Old Maid and the Thief*.



STEPHANIE MACINDOE

Stephanie Macindoe, mezzo-soprano, is undertaking a Masters of Music (Opera Performance) after completing a Graduate Diploma and a Bachelor of Arts. She is an experienced ensemble singer, performing with Gondwana Choirs and the Choir of Trinity College, Melbourne. Stephanie was an Apprentice with the Song Company in 2022, singing in their programs *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, *Tremors of Earth*, and *Tallis, Hope and Crown*. She recently sang the role of Mrs Nola in Menotti's *The Medium*.



TESSA MCKENNA

Tessa McKenna, mezzo-soprano, holds a Graduate Diploma in Music Performance and is completing her first year of the Masters of Music in Opera Performance at The Melbourne Conservatorium of Music. Alongside her Masters, Tessa is part of the 2024 Opera Scholars Australia program. Prior to her musical studies, Tessa completed a Bachelor of Science majoring in Zoology before deciding to make the switch to Opera. She recently sang the role of Baba in Menotti's *The Medium*.



METEHAN PEKTAS

Metehan Pektas, tenor, is from Türkiye and obtained his bachelor degree at the Istanbul Conservatory of Music. He made his Australian debut at Arts Centre Melbourne in *Women in War*, an opera based on the Gallipoli campaign, and participated in the *Gondwana Centenary Choir Project* at the Sydney Opera House both in 2015. Metehan recently sang the role of Bill (*A Hand of Bridge*) having performed Priest 1 and Armed Man 1 in *The Magic Flute* (Tamino cover).



NOAH STRAUGHAN

Noah Straughan, baritone is in his final year of the Master of Music (Opera Performance) and sings with Opera Scholars Australia. Performances include *The Speaker*, Papageno (u/s) (*The Magic Flute*, MCM), Dad, Giant (u/s) (*The Grumpiest Boy in the World*, Victorian Opera), Peter Quince (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, MCM) and ensemble in *Melbourne, Cheremushki* (Victorian Opera) and *Martha* (Lyster Opera). Scholarships include the Walter Kirby Singing, and Truby Williams Conservatorium Endowment.



MARIA WOOLFORD

Maria Woolford, mezzo-soprano, is in the 2nd year of the Master of Music (Opera Performance) at the University of Melbourne. She has also music studies at the University of Queensland. As a student, Maria has performed title roles ranging from *Little Women* (2018), *das Rheingold* (2018), *Norma* (2021), *Baby Doe* (2021), *Suor Angelica* (2022), *The Grumpiest Boy in the World* (2023) and *die Zauberflöte* (2023). Maria was a young artist in the Lisa Gasteen National Opera Program in 2022 and recently sang the principal role of Nancy in *Martha* (2024) with Lyster Opera.

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Recognised for our unique contribution to the country's operatic landscape, Victorian Opera joined the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework in 2021. Alongside other companies, Victorian Opera holds its rightful position in the national performing arts arena.

Commitment to the development and presentation of new Australian opera and musical theatre is forefront to our mission. We identify relative and topical material, commission and workshop new scores and librettos, and ultimately produce new productions. Victorian Opera premieres at least one new Australian opera or music theatre work each year, and have commissioned 40 new works since the company's formation.

The next generation of talent is developed from the ground up through our Emerging Artists Programs – The Victorian Opera Youth Chorus Ensemble (VOYCE), our VO Emerges project and our Emerging Artists Opera Prize scholarship. Creating future pathways for artists, artisans and technicians has become a driving focus for our organisation.

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