



VICTORIAN
OPERA

**ANNUAL REPORT
2024**

CHAIR'S MESSAGE

In my third term as Chair of Victorian Opera, I remain incredibly proud of the company's output and commitment to sharing the joy of opera across Victoria and beyond.

In 2024, we welcomed Stuart Maunder AM to the helm as Artistic Director, a national treasure in our theatrical landscape. There are few arts leaders as experienced or as insightful as Stuart. Stuart has directed many past productions for Victorian Opera, including the company's popular Sondheim trilogy. It is a privilege for Stuart to officially join our ranks and to work alongside our outstanding leader and one of his frequent creative collaborators, Elizabeth Hill-Cooper.

Victorian Opera also welcomed another stalwart of the Australian operatic landscape with the appointment of Sharolyn Kimmorley AM to the board. With decades of experience as an accompanist and artistic advisor, Sharolyn shares her breadth of knowledge as Chair of Victorian Opera's Artistic Committee.

On an artistic front, Victorian Opera presented a dazzling season of musical theatre gems (*Candide*, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*), rarely staged operas (*La Rondine* (*The Swallow*), *English Eccentrics*), a First Nations children's opera (*Parrwang Lifts the Sky*), and a world premiere (*Eucalyptus: The Opera*). We are proud to deliver such outstanding offerings to audiences throughout Victoria and interstate.

Of immense importance to us is the ongoing, inspirational and generous support of our partners, sponsors and donors. Without them, Victorian Opera could not continue to thrive.

I wish to warmly thank my fellow board and committee members for their invaluable contributions, along with the tireless endeavours of Victorian Opera's Chief Executive, staff, technicians and artists in delivering another year of remarkable artistic achievements.

Genevieve Overell AM
Chair

OUR BOARD

Chair
Genevieve Overell AM

Board of Directors
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Sharolyn Kimmorley AM
Richard Kurth
Selina Lightfoot
Grant Powell
Patricia Stebbens

Board Observers (2024)
Shandiya Balasubramaniam
Dianna Gu

CEO MESSAGE

Season 2024 marked the official commencement of Stuart Maunder AM as the company's Artistic Director at Victorian Opera. After many years of close collaboration with the company, 2024 was the beginning of a new era for Victorian Opera and the continuation of a close working relationship following Stuart's already storied career.

Stuart's inaugural season as Artistic Director opened with a triumphant production of Leonard Bernstein's *Candide* at the Palais Theatre, generating much buzz among critics and audiences alike. Victorian Opera returned to our home venue, the Palais Theatre, with a season of Puccini's *La Rondine* (*The Swallow*) in the 100th anniversary year of the composer's death. Season 2024's mainstage season closed with the Melbourne premiere of Jonathan Mills and Meredith Oakes' long anticipated adaptation of Murray Bail's Miles Franklin Award-winning novel *Eucalyptus*. A co-production with Opera Australia, Brisbane Festival and Perth Festival, *Eucalyptus: The Opera* also received performance seasons as part of Perth and Brisbane Festival.

The company also presented an opera as part of Sydney Festival with a unique staging of Puccini's *Il Tabarro* at the Australian National Maritime Museum. Sydney audiences were also treated to Opera Australia's season of co-production *Idomeneo* at the Sydney Opera House.

Stuart's hit production of Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* returned to Arts Centre Melbourne, Playhouse for a sold-out season. The production united many of the original cast and creative team,

including Antoinette Halloran as Mrs Lovett and Victorian Opera's Head of Music Phoebe Briggs as Musical Director.

As part of the company's comprehensive Education program, Victorian Opera re-staged the First Nations opera *Parrwang Lifts the Sky* by Deborah Cheetham Fraillon AO for primary schools in Melbourne and Ballarat. This production was presented as part of the company's Access All Areas program, which delivers four on-demand workshops alongside the opera itself, with the option to watch in-theatre, live digitally or on-demand.

The next generation of emerging talent took centre stage in *English Eccentrics* – an opportunity for many young artists to gain invaluable performance experience as well as a chance to delve into Australian composer Malcolm Williamson's rarely staged 1964 chamber opera.

I express my sincere thanks to Victorian Opera's artists, staff, board, patrons, trusts and foundations, and sponsors along with Creative Australia and the State Government of Victoria through Creative Victoria, for their incredible support in 2024.

Victorian Opera values this support wholly; support which enables us to collectively celebrate and share the joys and magic of this artform.

Elizabeth Hill-Cooper
Chief Executive Officer

2024 PRODUCTION OVERVIEW

CANDIDE

8 – 10 February
Palais Theatre, St Kilda

Total Audience
5,258

PARRWANG LIFTS THE SKY

10 – 18 May
Merlyn Theatre, Malthouse Theatre

Total Audience
1,620

ENGLISH ECCENTRICS

4 – 6 July
Union Theatre, The University
of Melbourne

Total Audience
1,026

LA RONDINE (THE SWALLOW)

8 – 10 August
Palais Theatre, St Kilda

Total Audience
2,442

SWEENEY TODD: THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET

14 – 21 September
Arts Centre Melbourne, Playhouse

Total Audience
7,557

EUCALYTPUS: THE OPERA

16 – 19 October
Palais Theatre, St Kilda

Total Audience
2,599

2024 ARTIST HIGHLIGHTS

2024 ARTIST ENGAGEMENT

85 artists were coached across
554 private rehearsals for a total of
1359.8 hours.

WORLD PREMIERE

Victorian Opera and Opera Australia
presented the world premiere of
Jonathan Mills and Meredith Oakes'
Eucalyptus: The Opera.

Based on Murray Bail's novel,
Eucalyptus: The Opera was staged in
Perth, Brisbane and Melbourne. It was
presented in association with Opera
Australia, Brisbane Festival, Perth
Festival with West Australian Opera.

Total National Audience: 4,417

DIGITAL ACCESS

Livestream and on-demand Digital
Access were available for two
productions, both new Australian
works: *Parrwang Lifts the Sky* and
Eucalyptus: The Opera.

In addition, livestreamed works of
2023 productions were available
on-demand in 2024: *The Visitors*
and *Galileo*.

**These productions reached an
online audience of 1,555**

INSPIRING AUDIENCES

Victorian Opera reached a national and international audience of

47,569

across

171

performances, activities and streamed events.

There were

6,388

unique views of Victorian Opera's Access All Areas: Livestream Program's four workshops and performance. They were streamed live and on-demand to 1,140 students and 103 teachers.

Victorian Opera's secondary school program Beyond the Stage had

406

unique views across its four workshops outlining of the creative processes of making a show. Across the program's in-theatre excursions to *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* and *Eucalyptus: The Opera*, there were 792 attendees from 15 schools.

Victorian Opera's work was seen across Australia, including seasons of *Eucalyptus: The Opera* at Perth Festival and Brisbane Festival, *Il Tabarro* at Sydney Festival, and *Idomeneo* at the Sydney Opera House. These works reached a total audience of

12,527

Victorian Opera welcomed many new audiences to the theatre in 2024, including 49.9% new audience to *Candide* and 69.9% new audience members to *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*.



CANDIDE

"Under the baton of Australasia's most in-demand and highly regarded symphony conductor Benjamin Northey, Orchestra Victoria sounds the sharpest they have in recent memory."

– ★★★★★ *The Age*



ENGLISH ECCENTRICS

"Directed by Victorian Opera's Artistic Director, Stuart Maunder, Australia's first professional production of English Eccentrics is full of pleasant surprises and discoveries"

– *Limelight*



2024 MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

LA RONDINE

"Soprano Kiandra Howarth builds her performance into an intoxicating force, exhibiting both the worldly and world-weary with divinely crafted vocal elegance, astute dynamics and a luminous top, whether silken or fiery of expression."

– *Australian Arts Review*



SWEENEY TODD: THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET

"This revived production from Victorian Opera and New Zealand Opera is highly polished and expertly realised."

– ★★★★★ *Arts Hub*



EUCALYPTUS: THE OPERA

"One of the principle joys of Eucalyptus the opera is the sheer beauty of Mills's music, its richness and colour; like Bail's prose, it shimmers and pulsates with the rhythms of the bush."

– ★★★★★ *The Guardian*

2024 GREEN ROOM AWARD WINNERS

OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE IN A LEAD ROLE

Katherine Allen for *Candide*

Michael Petruccelli for *Eucalyptus: The Opera*

OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE IN A SUPPORTING ROLE

Doug Kelly for *La Rondine*

OUTSTANDING DESIGN

Dann Barber (Set and Costumes) and
Matt Scott (Lighting) for *Candide*

OUTSTANDING DIRECTION

Dean Bryant (Direction) for *Candide*

OUTSTANDING MUSICAL ACHIEVEMENT

Orchestra Victoria, Ben Northey (Conductor) for
Candide Ensemble for *Candide*

OUTSTANDING PRODUCTION

Candide

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Address diversity areas outlined by the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework (33. iv) with particular reference to artists, key creatives, programming and audiences.

Build capacity in the Victorian sector; collaborate with partnership organisations and those outside the framework; and demonstrate leadership on specific concerns.

Develop pathways for Victorian Opera artists and opportunities for youth through opera education and learning programs.

Commission, develop and present new Australian works that reflect contemporary Australia.

Tour and present work for Victorian communities at least every two years.

VICTORIAN
OPERA



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Charlie Kinross (Cover, p.3, 6-7, 8-9, 12-13, back cover),
Hilary Walker (p.4-5, 7, 10-11)



EDUCATION

In 2024, Victorian Opera continued to offer a broad range of Education and Pathway opportunities for young people and emerging artists.

Parrwang Lifts the Sky, by Deborah Cheetham Fraillon AO, returned to the stage as Victorian Opera's family and education opera. This production was the focus of Victorian Opera's Access All Areas program, where primary students learn how opera is made through four interactive, on-demand workshops. Their lessons were cemented by attending the performance live or watching it digitally. Victorian Opera thanks the Victorian Department of Education, which provides funding through the Strategic Partnerships Program, as well as the Marian & E.H. Flack Trust, William Angliss Charitable Fund and the Gailey Lazarus Foundation.

Victorian Opera continued to deliver Beyond the Stage as the flagship education program for secondary schools. Across a series

of workshops, students focused on productions *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* and *Eucalyptus: The Opera*.

In 2024, Victorian Opera Youth Chorus Ensemble (VOYCE) had 47 participants who received expert musical guidance from VOYCE Director Angus Grant, répétiteurs Phoebe Briggs and Tom Griffiths, along with a series of special guest teachers. The ensemble had a successful year of performances. The 2024 Youth Opera, *Operabox*, was received with high acclaim, as was the annual Showcase Concert featuring Emerging Artists (Opera Prize winners) Michaela Cadwgan and Douglas Kelly.

A substantial philanthropic grant from Emeritus Professor Barbara Van Ernst AM provided ongoing financial support to both Victorian Opera's Youth Ambassadors Program and the New Work Opera Studio, in partnership with Montsalvat.

Following the establishment of The New Work Opera Studio, composer Peter Rutherford and a group of six participants continued to work closely together on the development of a new family-friendly opera, *The Lyrebird's Voice*, which will premiere in 2025. This project beautifully showcased Victorian Opera's commitment to both new work and nurturing emerging talent.

Prior to *Candide*, *Parrwang Lifts the Sky*, *English Eccentrics* and *Sweeney Todd*, Victorian Opera's Youth Ambassadors enjoyed pre-show discussions together over a meal, learnt more with exclusive behind-the-scenes talks and tours from key production staff and received tickets to the performances.

Victorian Opera is proud of the Education and Pathway opportunities it provides, and is excited to continue engaging young people and emerging artists into the future.

PATRONS PLAYED A PRINCIPAL ROLE

In 2024, Victorian Opera’s Patrons played a principal role in our success, demonstrated by their ongoing commitment to our work by making an annual donation to the company.

The financial support received from this highly valued and important cohort of Patrons continued to grow and we are so grateful for the invaluable source of revenue they provide each year. Every donation makes a significant impact and ultimately helps to bring opera to the stage.

Patrons saw how their gifts were invested through their participation in our Patrons’ Engagement Program. From attending private viewings of rehearsals to seeing our Opera Prize scholarship winners in recital, our patrons can recognise the benefit of their support and how it makes a difference.

We are proud to continue growing the number of supporters each year and thank them for their support.

Louise Lemke
Head of Development



OUR PATRONS

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Professor the Honourable Margaret
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The Late Dame Elisabeth Murdoch AC
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Secret Admirers (8)

Bequestors
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Lorraine Weiner & Geoffrey Blick
Tony Wildman & Robert Gibbs
Secret Admirers (7)

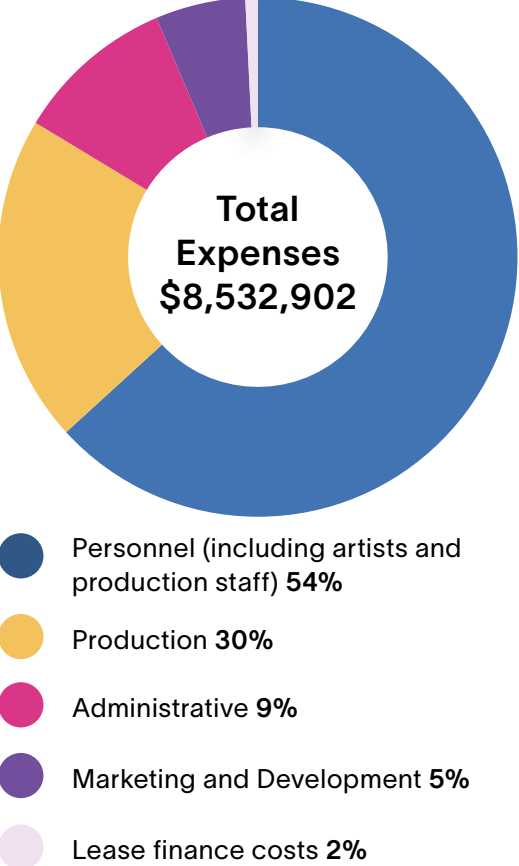
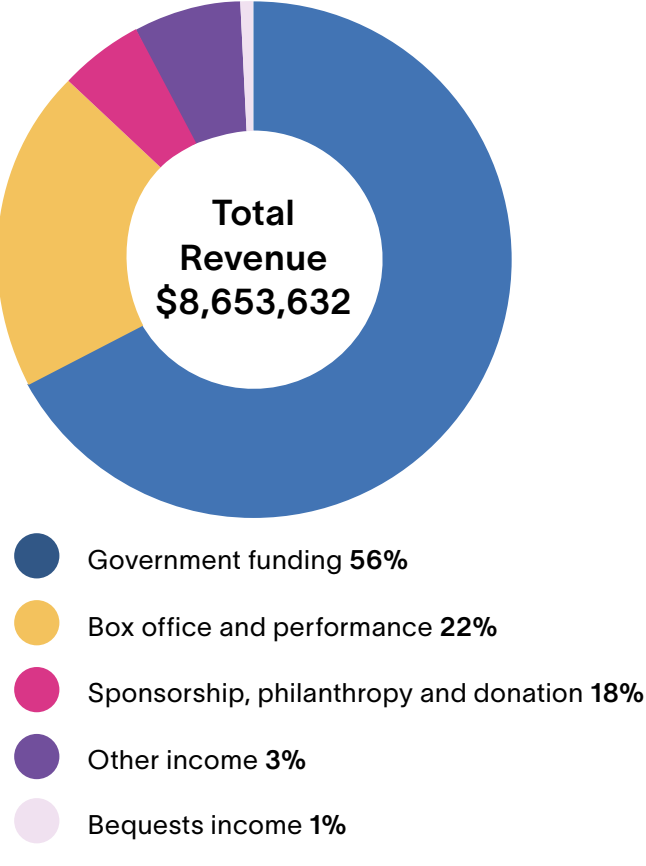
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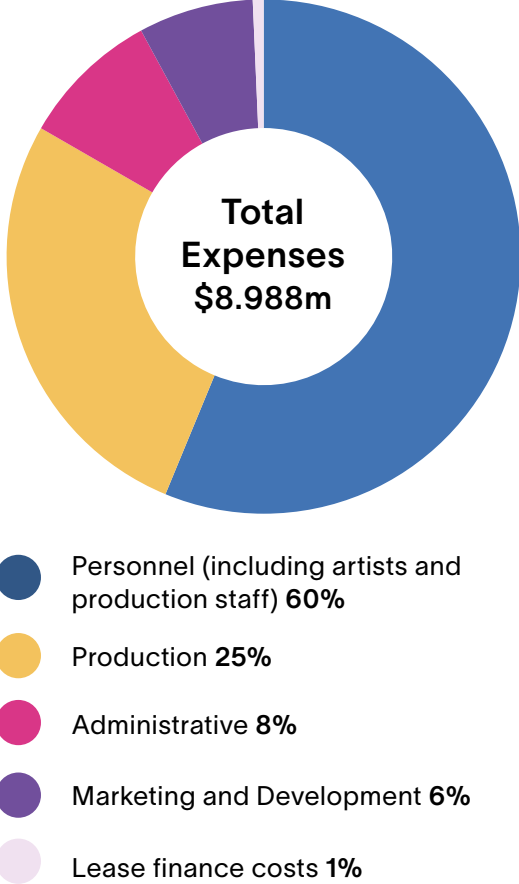
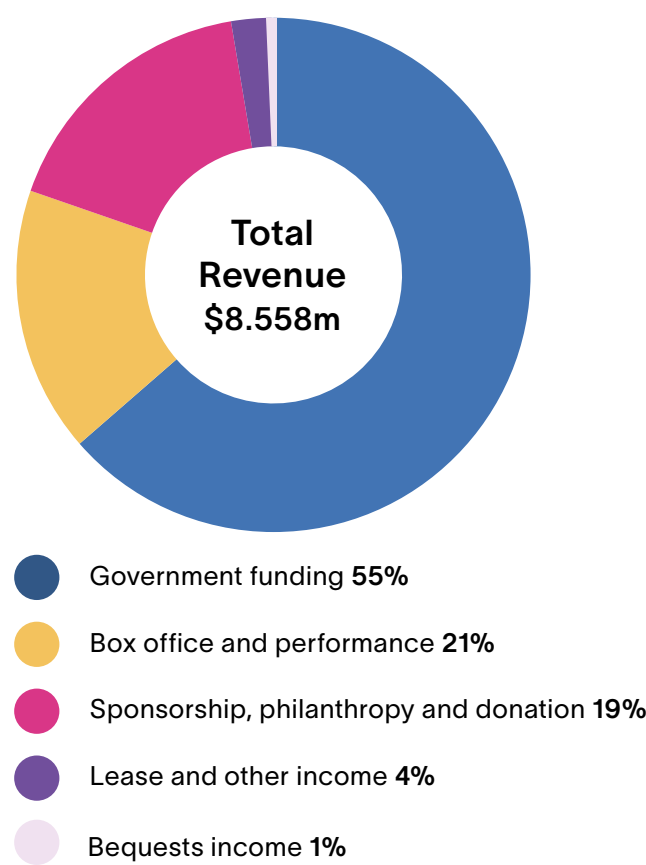
Louise Lemke
Head of Development
louise@victorianopera.com.au
(03) 9001 6405.

FINANCIALS

2024



2023



OUR PARTNERS

We acknowledge and thank our partners who make our work possible

GOVERNMENT PARTNERS

Australian Government

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

CREATIVE VICTORIA

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

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