

VICTORIAN OPERA



BOOJUM!

Victorian Opera respectfully acknowledges the people of the Eastern Kulin Nation, the Traditional Owners of the unceded land upon which we work and create.

We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the custodians of the lands and waterways across the Australian continent and their continuous connection in Caring for Country.

We reflect on our shared responsibility to honour and respect this land and its stories, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

VICTORIAN OPERA PRESENTS

BOOJUM!

Book by **Martin Wesley-Smith & Peter Wesley-Smith**

Lyrics by **Peter Wesley-Smith**

Music by **Martin Wesley-Smith**

Based on Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark*

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor **Warwick Stengårds**

Director **Stuart Maunder AM**

Set & Costume Designer **Ishan Vivekanantham**

Lighting Designer **Robert Brown**

CAST

Lewis Carroll & Rev Charles Dodgson

David Hobson

Alice **Rachael Joyce**

Mrs Hargreaves **Michaela Cadwgan**

White Rabbit **Alessia Pintabona**

Al, The American & Tweedledum **Darcy Carroll**

Wal, The Bellman **Bailey Montgomerie**

Carl, The Russian & Tweedledee & Caterpillar

Joshua Morton-Galea

Clarrie, The Butcher **Syrah Torii**

Cora, The Bootmaker **Chloe James**

Errol **Lachlan Bartlett**

The Hatter **Nicholas Matters**

CHORUS

Nate Clarke, Kyan Esler, Declan Farr, Ruben Fitton, Genevieve Gray, Georgie Grech, Lucy Hood, Victoria Knight, Yvette Lipovetsky, Saskia Mascitti, Charlotte Plum, Tabitha Plummer, Noah Straughan, Alexander Thorpe, Oliver Turner, Joshua Vass, Tahlia Walker, Amir Yacoub

ORCHESTRA

Piano **Phoebe Briggs & Tom Griffiths**

Double Bass **Nic Synot**

Percussion **Peter Neville**

HORTICULTURAL HALL, HEMSTRITCH STUDIO
7 - 23 NOVEMBER 2025

Sung in English



FROM THE DIRECTOR

Not quite opera, not quite musical comedy, *Boojum!* is an irresistible, peculiar and topsy-turvy adventure. It is at once cheeky and profound, a feather-light yet deadly serious choral fantasia. Above all, it is a glittering love letter to the deliciously crooked imagination of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, best known by his pen name Lewis Carroll.

On one level, *Boojum!* is a 'nonsense opera', springboarding from Carroll's epic poem *The Hunting of the Snark*, while dragging in characters from across his stories (and his own curious life). But hidden inside the nonsense is something more tender: memories, hopes and fears from the mind of Dodgson — the man who lived in Lewis Carroll's shadow, pondering his life, mortality and the curious contradictions of both identities.

At first glance, *Boojum!* is all nonsense — and nonsense it proudly is! But underneath the wordplay and puns, creators Martin and Peter Wesley-Smith tell a slyly moving story: the inner tug-of-war between the immortal author Carroll, and Dodgson, the quieter soul.

But *Boojum!* is not biography, nor history. Instead, it is an imagined inner landscape, a phantasmagoria of daydreams, arguments and half-remembered moments. Its gloriously chaotic, illogical structure mirrors

the way an aging mind might wander, veering between fact and fancy, collapsing reality into Wonderland.

And then there's Alice. Or rather, two Alices. The eternal child, forever chasing rabbits and riddles. She drifts through Dodgson's memory as his most treasured spark. But the grown woman — Alice Hargreaves — will not be ignored. She is no fantasy, but flesh and history. In *Boojum!*, Dodgson must learn to embrace both: to say goodbye to the girl in pinafores while finally recognising the woman she became. Only then can he step off the great Chessboard of Life and face his own boojum with something like peace.

We are delighted to share Victorian Opera's new production of *Boojum!* with you, featuring some of Victoria's most dazzling young singers alongside the talents from the Victorian Opera Youth Chorus Ensemble (VOYCE). Leading them all is the extraordinary artist, David Hobson. This blend of talent is what the VO Emerging Artist program is all about.

So, buckle up for the great snark hunt! Dodgson himself knew better than anyone: it's only by tumbling head-first into nonsense that we sometimes stumble into sense.

STUART MAUNDER AM
Artistic Director

FROM THE CONDUCTOR

Boojum! by Martin Wesley-Smith is a thrilling blend of choral opera and music theatre — a witty, thought-provoking and deeply imaginative work that dances between nonsense and truth. Inspired by Lewis Carroll's fantastical poem *The Hunting of the Snark*, Wesley-Smith and his librettist brother Peter transform Carroll's wordplay and absurd logic into a vivid musical journey that is as funny as it is profound.

At its core, *Boojum!* celebrates invention — of words, of sounds, of meaning itself. Wesley-Smith's score is a playground of musical ideas, filled with clever structures and surprising twists. One particularly striking device is the crab canon, where a musical line is mirrored and reversed, like a conversation folding back upon itself. This technique, playful yet precise, reflects the opera's fascination with symmetry, reflection, and contradiction, echoing Carroll's love of puzzles and paradoxes.

The chorus is the lifeblood of this piece. Far more than background or accompaniment, the chorus acts as narrator, commentator and co-conspirator in the storytelling. At times it offers a rich, almost orchestral texture. At others, it becomes a rhythmic engine of energy and mischief. Every voice contributes to the kaleidoscopic world of *Boojum!*, where clarity, humour and a touch of madness coexist.

Wesley-Smith delights in transforming the familiar into the unexpected. Nursery rhymes and children's songs drift through the score — recognisable for a moment, then twisted or fragmented into new shapes. What once felt safe and simple becomes strange, ironic, or unsettling, reminding us how thin the line can be between innocence and absurdity.

To conduct *Boojum!* is to step into a hall of mirrors where logic laughs at itself, and every reflection reveals something new. It is a joyous, demanding, and utterly original work that invites performers and audience alike to embrace curiosity, confusion and wonder.

As Carroll might say: the chase is half the fun — so let us all go hunting the Snark together!

WARWICK STENGÅRDS
Conductor

SYNOPSIS

Boojum! is an absurd ramble through the characters and curious life of Lewis Carroll.

We open with a funeral — farewell, poor Baker, gone before his time. This is a shame, he was supposed to help pursue the curious and inexplicable creature from Carroll's poem, *The Hunting of the Snark*.

But the show must go on! Out of the Victorian fog tumble Carroll's wonderfully oddball characters of the Snark-hunting crew. Led by the Bellman, we meet Boots, Beaver, the Banker, the Billiard-Marker, the Barrister, and the Butcher. And then, quite out of nowhere, comes Alice — not from the Snark poem at all, but forever Carroll's beloved muse.

Enter Reverend Charles Dodgson, a shy Oxford teacher who promptly reveals his secret: he is also Lewis Carroll. At this point he, naturally, splits into two. Poor Dodgson is then volunteered to take the dead Baker's spot on the Snark hunt.

Meanwhile, we peek into Dodgson's inner world. Mrs Hargreaves (Alice, all grown up and married) reminisces about those golden childhood afternoons when Dodgson spun stories of rabbits, cats, and endless riddles.

But Carroll, his louder, wilder alter ego, won't let Dodgson rest. Carroll is constantly teasing Dodgson, tempting him, and pulling him away from the calm of mathematics and order. All the while, time marches relentlessly forward, threatening to steal Alice away forever.

The Snark hunt gets underway with plenty of bluster and bravado. The only problem? If the Snark turns out to be a Boojum, the whole lot of them will "softly and suddenly vanish away".

Along the journey we tumble through Dodgson's quirks: his delight in puzzles and gadgets, his fascination with photography, and plenty of whimsical detours into Carroll's absurd fantasy worlds — simply because nonsense is fun.

But beware. Nothing in Carroll's universe is quite what it seems. As young Alice edges toward adulthood, as the hunters corner their Snark, the story takes a darker turn.

Dodgson must finally face what we all must face — his very own Boojum.

PRODUCTION

PRODUCTION

Company Manager
Finlay Pedler

Stage Manager
Claudia Howarth

Assistant Stage Manager
Jamie Turner

Set Construction
Alex Donnelly
Tiernan Maclaren

COSTUME BUILD CREW

Costume Manager
Mel Serjeant

Costume Assistant
Becky Silveira

Costumiers
Nicole Serjeant
Olivia Peters
Ines Kustura
Cortnee Jarvis
Xander Reichard
Vannessa Roberts

THEATRE CREW

Wardrobe Supervisor
Becky Silveira

Dressers
Vannessa Roberts
Xander Reichard
Cortnee Jarvis



CREATIVE TEAM



WARWICK STENGÅRDS CONDUCTOR

Warwick Stengårds is an Australian/Swedish freelance conductor based in Vienna, following a four-year engagement as Assistant Generalmusikdirektor at the Volksoper Wien and a seven-year tenure as Erster Kapellmeister at the Luzerner Theater.

In addition to an extensive symphonic canon, Stengårds has a music-theatre repertoire of over 100 works. He has performed with companies such as Vienna State Opera, Volksoper Wien, Folkoperan Stockholm, Opera Australia, Victoria State Opera, Chamber Made Opera and West Australian Opera where, in 1991, he was appointed Music Director.

He was appointed Chefdirigent in 2004 for the internationally acclaimed Johann Strauss Capelle and Schönbrunner Schlossorchester. Stengårds has also conducted the Ulster Orchestra in a series of concerts and recordings for the British Broadcasting Corporation, the SL Orkester, the Uppsala Kammarorkester, Klangforum Wien, MUSIKFABRIK (Köln), the Wrocław Philharmonic, the Rundfunk Sinfonie-Orchester Saarbrücken (featuring soloist Andreas Scholl), DalaSinfoniettan, the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra, the European Doctors Orchestra and the Nürnberger Symphoniker.



STUART MAUNDER DIRECTOR

Stuart Maunder has been directing musical theatre and opera in Australia for 44 years. He joined The Australian Opera as Stage Manager in 1978, becoming a Resident Director in 1981. He returned to Opera Australia as Artistic Administrator in 1999, becoming Executive Producer in 2004.

His OA productions include *Tales of Hoffmann*, *Manon*, *Gypsy Princess*, *Don Pasquale*, *Trial by Jury*, *Pirates of Penzance* and *H.M.S Pinafore* and *My Fair Lady*. From 2014 to 2018, Stuart was General Director of New Zealand Opera, before joining State Opera South Australia as Artistic Director in 2018. In May 2023, he helmed Australia's first ever G&S Festival for that company.

In 2023, Stuart became Artistic Director of Victorian Opera. His past productions for VO have included *Follies*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Into the Woods*, *Sweeney Todd*, *A Little Night Music*, *Cunning Little Vixen*, *English Eccentrics* and *La Rondine*.



ISHAN VIVEKANANTHAM SET & COSTUME DESIGNER

Ishan Vivekanantham is a set and costume designer specialising in creating visually striking and immersive worlds for live performance. A graduate of the Master of Production Design at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA), his work includes *I Love you Faustus* (Unspooled Theatre Collective), *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It* (Melbourne Shakespeare Company), *The Lyrebird's Voice* (Victorian Opera) and The Australian Ballet's *Storytime: Cinderella* (dir. David McAllister).

His craft has been recognised with the Cassidy Bequest – Production (2022) and Trina Parker (2023) scholarships for design excellence. In 2025, he joined the Melbourne Theatre Company as a part of the Future Creatives program and was awarded the inaugural Truscott Prize, supported by the Victorian Opera, Truscott Design Foundation and the VCA, acknowledging his dedication and passion for theatrical design.



ROBERT BROWN LIGHTING DESIGNER

Robert Brown is a Melbourne-based designer in projections and lighting whose work spans opera, dance and theatre on the international stage.

Robert has led the production and lighting departments for the Paul Taylor Dance Company in New York, shaping Lincoln Center seasons, global tours, and newly commissioned works alongside renowned designers such as Jennifer Tipton and James F Ingalls.

His lighting credits include The Paul Taylor Company (New York), Trainor Dance (New York), Imagination Stage (Washington DC), St. Louis Black Rep (Missouri), Barrington Stage Company (Massachusetts), and Palm Beach Opera (Florida). His projection and media work includes designs for Musical Theater Factory (New York), and Philadelphia Theatre Company (Pennsylvania). At Victorian Opera, he designed the lighting for *Mansfield Park* and *The Lyrebird's Voice* and was the video designer for *Katya Kabanova*.

Robert holds a Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Design from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, specialising in Lighting and Projection Design, and a Bachelor of Arts from Kalamazoo College.

CAST



DAVID HOBSON LEWIS CARROLL/CHARLES DODGSON

David Hobson, tenor and composer, began his career with the Victorian State Opera in 1984. He has since become one of Australia's best known operatic and recording artists.

David has sung many roles for both Australian and international opera companies, including his award-winning performances of Rodolfo (*La bohème*) and the title role in *Orphée*. Other roles include: Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*), Ferrando (*Così fan Tutte*), Count Almaviva (*The Barber of Seville*), Nadir (*The Pearl Fishers*), Lindoro (*L'Italiana in Algeri*), Frederic (*The Pirates of Penzance*), The Architect (world premiere of *The Eighth Wonder*), Eisenstein (*Die Fledermaus*), Lewis Carroll (*Through the Looking Glass*), Nemorino (*The Elixir of Love*), the title role in *Candide*, Danilo (*The Merry Widow*) and Aristaeus/Pluto (*Orpheus in the Underworld*).

In the world of music theatre, David has played the roles of Caractacus Potts in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, Buddy in Sondheim's *Follies* and Nicky Arnstein in *Funny Girl*.

Special engagements include appearing with the San Francisco Opera in the world premiere of *Dangerous Liaison*, a performance in the Great Hall Canberra, for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, Schubert's *Winterreise* for the Queensland Symphony Orchestra and singing the National Anthem at the AFL Grand Final. David has performed his solo show at the Sydney Opera House and at the Adelaide Cabaret Festival, and toured nationally with Marina Prior, Lisa McCune, Yvonne Kenney, Teddy Tahu Rhodes and, more recently, his close friend Colin Lane.

He is well known from his appearances on *Carols by Candlelight*, *Carols in the Domain*, *Spicks and Specks*, *It Takes Two*, *Dancing with the Stars* and as a presenter on the Foxtel's Arts channel, STVDIO.

David has recorded numerous albums, many reaching No 1 chart status. He has also won awards including Operatic Performer of the Year, the Sydney Critics Circle Award, *The Age* Performing Arts Award for Best Performer in Opera and an Australian Record Industry Association (ARIA) Award.

In 2026 David will perform in *OVATION*, a concert tour of Australia, with Marina Prior, Silvie Paladino and Michael Cormick.



RACHAEL JOYCE
Alice



MICHAELA CADOGAN
Mrs Hargreaves



ALESSIA PINTABONA
White Rabbit



DARCY CARROLL
Al, The American
& Tweedledum



BAILEY MONTGOMERIE
Wal, The Bellman



JOSHUA MORTON-GALEA
Carl, The Russian
& Tweedledee
& Caterpillar



SYRAH TORII
Clarrie, The Butcher



CHLOE JAMES
Cora, The Bootmaker



LACHLAN BARTLETT
Errol



NICHOLAS MATTERS
The Hatter

CHORUS



NATE CLARKE



KYAN ESLER



DECLAN FARR



RUBEN FITTON



**NOAH
STRAUGHAN**



**ALEXANDER
THORPE**



OLIVER TURNER



JOSHUA VASS



GENEVIEVE GRAY



GEORGIE GRECH



LUCY HOOD



VICTORIA KNIGHT



TAHLIA WALKER



AMIR YACCOUB



**YVETTE
LIPOVETSKY**



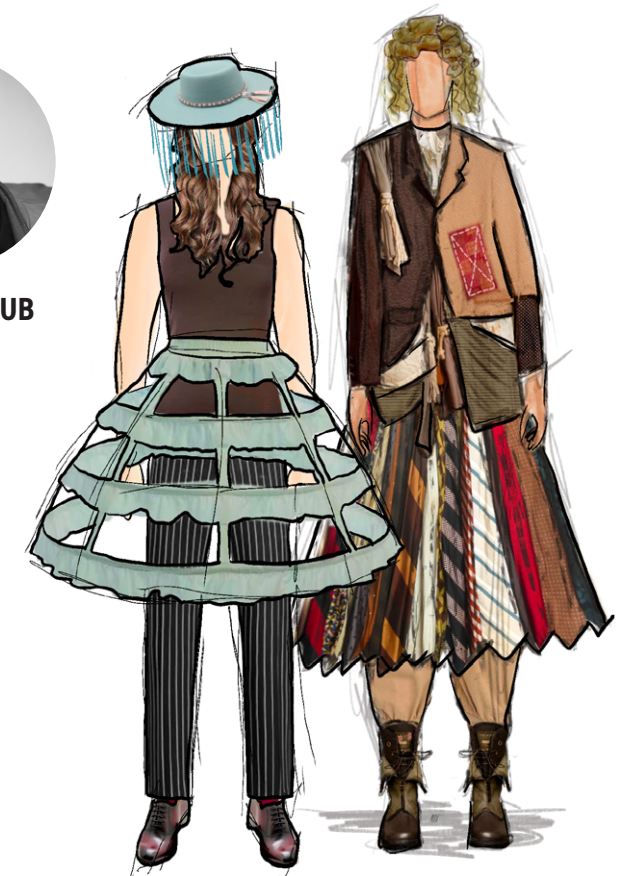
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MASCITTI**



**CHARLOTTE
PLUM**



**TABITHA
PLUMMER**



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VICTORIAN
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SEASON 2026

THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE

31 JANUARY – 6 FEBRUARY
PALAIS THEATRE

REG LIVERMORE'S NED KELLY: THE MUSICAL

28 MARCH
HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE, BALLARAT

THE MAGIC PUDDING: THE OPERA

15 – 30 MAY
THE ROUND, DAREBIN ARTS CENTRE, BUNJIL PLACE

THE CORONATION OF POPPEA

30 JUNE – 4 JULY
PALAIS THEATRE

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

29 SEPTEMBER – 1 OCTOBER
PALAIS THEATRE

THE SPARE ROOM

7 – 10 OCTOBER
ARTS CENTRE MELBOURNE, PLAYHOUSE

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VICTORIAN OPERA

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