

# VICTORIAN OPERA



**ANNUAL REPORT  
2025**

## CHAIR'S MESSAGE

As Chair of Victorian Opera, I proudly applaud the company for delivering such an artistically rich, diverse and widely celebrated 2025 season.

During 2025, we farewelled three long-serving Board members upon their retirement. Vivienne Corcoran, Grant Powell and Selina Lightfoot each gave many years of dedicated service to Victorian Opera, and we sincerely thank them for their commitment, wisdom and invaluable contribution.

Following their retirement, we welcomed several new Board members: Amanda Watt, Sam Redston, Gillian Wong, Josef Oduwo and Michael Smolders. We are grateful to welcome such a dynamic and accomplished group to the company.

I also wish to warmly thank my fellow Board and Committee members for their hard work, along with the tireless efforts of Victorian Opera's Chief Executive Officer and Artistic Director, staff, technicians and artists, whose dedication has delivered another year of remarkable artistic achievement.

**GENEVIEVE OVERELL AM**  
Chair

## OUR BOARD

**Chair**  
Genevieve Overell AM

**Board of Directors**  
Patricia Stebbens  
Sharolyn Kimmorley AM  
Richard Kurth  
Vivienne Corcoran  
Grant Powell  
Selina Lightfoot  
Amanda Watt  
Sam Redston  
Gillian Wong  
Josef Oduwo  
Michael Smolders

**Board Observers**  
Lucy Cavallaro  
Ben Nielsen

## CEO MESSAGE

Victorian Opera celebrated many artistic achievements in Season 2025 and proudly shared the joys of opera and musical theatre across the state and far beyond.

We commenced the season with an acclaimed new production of Stephen Sondheim and James Goldman's musical *Follies* at the Palais Theatre. Under the helm of Artistic Director Stuart Maunder's direction and musical direction by our Head of Music Phoebe Briggs, Victorian Opera welcomed a mega-watt star cast of Australian theatre legends including Marina Prior, Rhonda Burchmore, Colette Mann, Geraldene Morrow and company stalwart Antoinette Halloran. Our cast delivered dazzling performances in costumes by Tony Award-winning legend Roger Kirk. We welcomed many interstate audience members for the country's first professionally staged production of the iconic musical.

While presenting *Follies* at the Palais Theatre, we were staging our hit production of Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* at Dubai Opera. It was a privilege to stage these hit productions on opposite sides of the world simultaneously and a credit to our team's efforts.

Across regional Victoria, we presented the Australian premiere of Jonathan Dove's adaptation of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. We were delighted to share this charming production in historic houses across Melbourne as well as a larger scale season at Her Majesty's Theatre Ballarat.

Melbourne's winter saw our adaptation of Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* premiere under the abridged title *Abduction* at the Palais Theatre. Director Con Costi and conductor Chad Kelly brought vibrancy to their seductive new production set in a cult-like mansion and starring the next generation of Australian operatic talent in a series of homecoming performances.

Our new production of Leoš Janáček's *Katya Kabanova* received critical acclaim and incredible audience responses following its October premiere at the Palais Theatre. The inner torment of protagonist Katya was on full display in director Heather Fairbairn's production, which incorporated live-captured cinema and striking video design.

We were thrilled that soprano Desiree Frahn's performance in the title role was recognised with several awards. The opera featured the Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM) Orchestra under the baton of Alexander Briger. As the nephew of the world's most important conductor of Janáček's music – Sir Charles Mackerras, the cast and orchestra were in expert hands following Briger's lifelong exposure to the Czech composer's unique music.

As part of the company's comprehensive Education program, Victorian Opera presented the world premiere of family opera *The Lyrebird's Voice*. The work itself was developed by a series of young Victorians through a series of workshops with composer Peter Rutherford who later created the work alongside librettist Jayde Kichert. This production was staged across metropolitan Melbourne and 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 *Boojum* – an opportunity for many young artists to gain invaluable performance experience as well as a chance to discover Australian composers Martin Wesley-Smith and Peter Wesley-Smith's rarely staged nonsense opera *Boojum!* Based on characters from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and his poem *The Hunting of the Snark*, the production starred theatre legend David Hobson in a dual role as Reverend Charles Dodgson and Dodgson's alter-ego Lewis Carroll.

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 2025.

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

## 2025 PRODUCTION OVERVIEW

### FOLLIES

1 - 6 FEBRUARY

Palais Theatre, St Kilda

Total Audience  
**8013**

### MANSFIELD PARK

5 MARCH, Rippon Lea Estate

4 - 5 APRIL, Her Majesty's Theatre Ballarat

30 - 31 MAY, Horti Hall

6 JUNE, Montsalvat

Total Audience  
**1295**

### THE LYREBIRD'S VOICE

8 - 10 MAY, The Round

16 MAY, Darebin Arts Centre

21 - 23 MAY, Frankston Arts Centre

Total Audience  
**1117**

### ABDUCTION

12 - 16 AUGUST

Palais Theatre, St Kilda

Total Audience  
**4033**

### KATYA KABANOVA

14 - 16 OCTOBER

Palais Theatre, St Kilda

Total Audience  
**3097**

### BOOJUM!

7 - 23 NOVEMBER

Horti Hall

Total Audience  
**805**

## 2025 ARTISTIC HIGHLIGHTS

### 2025 ARTISTS ENGAGEMENT

149 artists were coached across 434 private rehearsals for a total of 2062.5 hours.

### AUSTRALIAN MAINSTAGE PREMIERE

Victorian Opera presented Australia's first professional production of Stephen Sondheim and James Goldman's *Follies*.

Rarely staged due to its scale and cast size, the company was thrilled to assemble Australia's leading musical theatre artists from across the past six decades to perform side-by-side.

### DIGITAL ACCESS

Livestream and on-demand Digital Access were available for two productions: *The Lyrebird's Voice* and *Abduction*.

In addition, livestreamed works of 2024 productions were available on demand in 2025: *Parrwang Lifts the Sky* and *Eucalyptus: The Opera*.

These productions reached an online audience of 1220.

# INSPIRING AUDIENCES

Victorian Opera reached a national and international audience of

## 45,395

across

## 142

performances, activities and streamed events.

Across four workshops and performance, Victorian Opera's Access All Areas: Livestream Program was streamed live and on-demand to

## 7,684

students and teachers.

Victorian Opera's work was seen across the world with

## 4,860

attending the company's production of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* in Dubai.

The company's production of *Candide* was also revived by Opera Australia for a season at the Sydney Opera House to an audience of

## 10,131

Victorian Opera welcomed many new audiences to the theatre in 2025, including

## 53%

new audience to *Follies* and

## 43%

new audience members to *Abduction*.



## FOLLIES

"A sumptuous, perfectly cast production of this rarely performed musical gives deeply satisfying context to some of Sondheim's most loved songs."

— *Limelight* ★★★★★

"Musical theatre lovers should seize the opportunity to see *Follies* performed as intended. You may not get another chance, and the star-studded cast and live orchestra give this musical drama all the glamour and turbulence it needs to cast its haunting spell."

— *The Age*

## THE LYREBIRD'S VOICE

"As an introduction to opera – or simply dazzling entertainment – *The Lyrebird's Voice* is an absolute must see."

— *Classic Melbourne*



## MANSFIELD PARK

"A musical and theatrical treat"

— *Limelight*



# 2025 MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

## ABDUCTION

"Victorian Opera took a massive, though calculated risk with *Abduction* and, judging by the ecstatic reaction from an unusually young audience, it paid off handsomely."

— *The Age*

"There was something fresh, cheeky and wonderfully entertaining about Victorian Opera's sensual and saucy production of Mozart's *Abduction*."

— *ClassikON*

## BOOJUM!

"In a work that serves well as a vehicle for emerging young artists, Maunder steers a cast of 10 and a chorus of 18 enthusiastic participants with suitably focused and lively results."

— *Australian Arts Review*

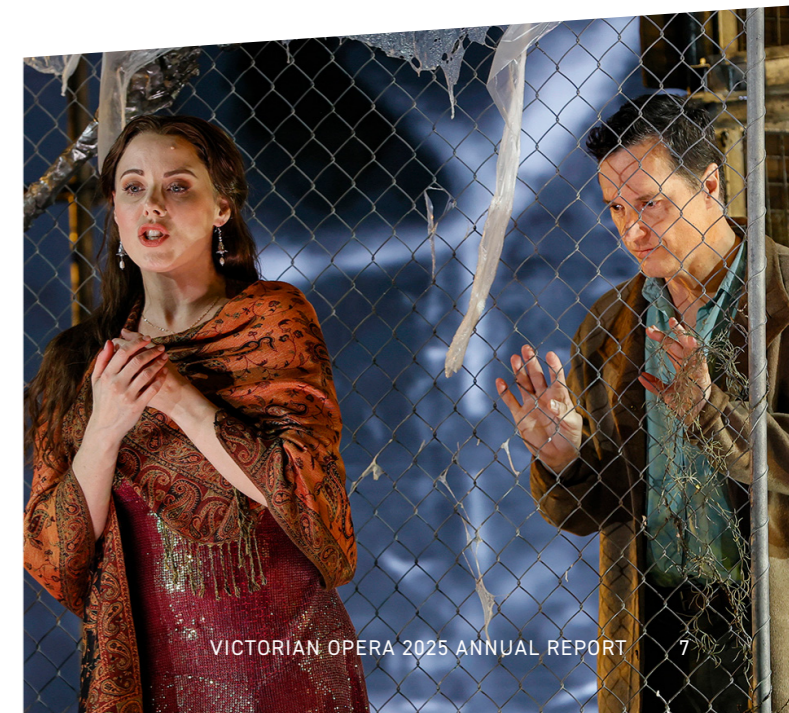
## KATYA KABANOVA

"A coup for Victorian Opera, which has also struck gold with the powerful and refreshingly new cinematic approach of this production directed by Heather Fairbairn."

— *Limelight*

"Victorian Opera's production scored at every turn, with a splendid Australian cast, ingenious and creative production, and daring and clever use of live black and white video throughout on a full-stage screen. Not least was the Australian National Academy of Music orchestra's extraordinary playing, sensitively and effectively led by Alexander Briger (nephew of Charles Mackerras, one of the finest Janáček conductors)."

— *The Age* ★★★★★



# 2025 AWARD HIGHLIGHTS

Victorian Opera is proud to receive **eight** Green Room Awards for its productions in 2025, including:

## OUTSTANDING PERFORMER IN A LEADING ROLE

Desiree Frahn, *Katya Kabanova*

## OUTSTANDING DESIGN

Robert Brown (Video Design) and Niklas Pajanti (Lighting), *Katya Kabanova*

## OUTSTANDING PERFORMER IN A SUPPORTING ROLE

Emily Edmonds, *Katya Kabanova*  
Michael Petrucelli, *Katya Kabanova*

## OUTSTANDING CREATIVE CONTRIBUTION AND DIRECTION

Ben Sheen (Assistant Director / Cinematographer), *Katya Kabanova*

## OUTSTANDING MUSICAL ACHIEVEMENT

Alexander Briger (Conductor) and Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM) Orchestra, *Katya Kabanova*

## OUTSTANDING COSTUME DESIGN

Roger Kirk (Costume), *Follies*

## THE BETTY POUNDER AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING AUSTRALIAN CHOREOGRAPHY

Yvette Lee, *Follies*

The company is also proud to receive **four** OperaChaser Critics Awards, including:

## OUTSTANDING PRODUCTION

*Katya Kabanova*

## OUTSTANDING FEMALE IN A LEADING ROLE

Desiree Frahn, *Katya Kabanova*

## OUTSTANDING MALE IN A SUPPORTING ROLE

Luke Stoker, *Abduction*

## OUTSTANDING LIGHTING DESIGNER

Niklas Pajanti, *Katya Kabanova*

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.

# GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

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

Tour and present work for Victorian communities.

# VICTORIAN OPERA



Photography Credits:  
 Jeff Busby (Cover, p. 2, 4-10, 12-13, back cover),  
 Charlie Kinross (p. 6,11), Casey Horsfield (p. 7, 10)



## EDUCATION MESSAGE

In 2025, Victorian Opera continued to offer a broad range of education and pathway opportunities for young people and emerging artists.

As part of our annual Opera Prize program, three singers joined the company in full-time positions as salaried artists. Michaela Cadwgan returned for her second year as a developing artist, while we welcomed Rachael Joyce and Bailey Montgomerie to the program. These artists worked intensely across the year starring in various productions and recitals, coaching roles with our music staff and receiving mentorship from myself and Artistic Director Stuart Maunder. We gratefully delivered this program thanks to the support of Dr Michael Stubbs & Malcolm Roberts and Mary Davidson and the family of the late Frederick Davidson AM.

*The Lyrebird's Voice* was presented as Victorian Opera's family and education opera and staged across three outer metropolitan Melbourne venues. This world premiere opera was developed as part of the company's The New Work Opera Studio by composer Peter Rutherford and a group of six participants under the age of 25.

The 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 learnings were cemented by attending the performance live or watching it digitally. Victorian Opera gratefully thanks the Victorian Department of Education, which provides funding through the Strategic Partnerships Program, as well as the Marian & E.H. Flack Trust, the Besen Foundation, the Gailey Lazarus Foundation and the William Angliss Charitable Fund.

Victorian Opera continued to deliver Beyond the Stage as the flagship education program for secondary schools. The production focussed as part of this season was Mozart's reimagined opera *Abduction*. Students engaged with a series of online workshops, an exclusive preview of a stage orchestral rehearsal and seeing the production itself. We gratefully thank the Victorian Department of Education for funding provided through the Victorian Challenge and Enrichment Series program.

In 2025, Victorian Opera Youth Chorus Ensemble (VOYCE) had 44 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.

A philanthropic grant from Emeritus Professor Barbara Van Ernst AM provided ongoing financial support to Victorian Opera's Youth Ambassadors Program. Prior to *Follies*, *Mansfield Park*, *The Lyrebird's Voice*, *Abduction* and *Katya Kabanova*, 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 excited to continue engaging young people and emerging artists in the future.

**ELIZABETH HILL-COOPER**  
 Chief Executive Officer

# DEVELOPMENT MESSAGE

Every year, Victorian Opera's patrons play a principal role in our success through 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 in 2025 and we are 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 see the benefit of their support and how it makes a difference.

We are proud to continue growing the number of patrons each year and thank them for their support through their donations and the extraordinary enthusiasm towards Victorian Opera's work.

## LOUISE LEMKE

Head of Development

If you would like information on supporting Victorian Opera, please contact Louise Lemke, Head of Development, [louise@victorianopera.com.au](mailto:louise@victorianopera.com.au) or by phone on (03) 9001 6405.



## OUR PATRONS

### Patron-in-Chief

The Governor of Victoria, Her Excellency Professor the Honourable Margaret Gardner AC

### Founding Benefactors

The Late Dame Elisabeth Murdoch AC  
Lady Potter AC

### Leadership Syndicate (\$40,000+)

Mary Davidson and family of the late Frederick R Davidson AM  
Carol Colburn Grigor CBE  
Jane Hemstrich AO  
Hans & Petra Henkell  
Peter Laver AM  
Joy Selby Smith  
Dr Michael Stubbs & Malcolm Roberts

### Artistic Director's Circle (\$10,000+)

Ren Barlow  
Pam Caldwell  
John & Diana Frew  
Suzanne Kirkham  
Stuart Maunder  
Tony & Genny Nunan  
Michael Rigg & Gerard Condon AM  
Greg Shalit & Miriam Faine  
Madeleine Coulombe & Nigel Simpson  
Prof Barbara van Ernst AM  
Lyn Williams AM

### Platinum Patrons (\$5,000+)

D&T Brown  
Tony Buzzard AM & Pamela Craig

Carolyn & Stephen Coffey  
Lord Ebury  
Marg Flatman  
Linda Herd  
Elizabeth Hill-Cooper  
Mary-Jane Gething AO  
Peter J Griffin AM & Terry Swann  
Peter & Melissa Hebbard  
Angela Kayser  
Peter Lovell & Michael Jan  
Kaye E Marion  
Grant Powell & Sally McCutchan  
Dr Richard Reed & Vivienne Reed OAM  
Sage Foundation  
Lady Southey AC  
Chris & Helen Trueman  
Secret Admirers (1)

### Gold Patrons (\$2,500+)

Paulette & Warwick Bisley  
Margot Brenton  
Alan Chuck & Wendy Hughes Chuck  
Jim Colvin  
Jennifer Darbyshire & David Walker  
Dr M Elizabeth Douglas  
John & Gaye Gaylard  
Nance Grant AM MBE & Ian Harris  
Colin Gunther & Richard Laslett  
Ian Kennedy AM & Dr Sandra Hacker AO  
Greg Noonan  
Ruth & Tom O'Dea  
George Pappas AO  
Elzbieta & Tomasz Romanowski  
Ian Baker and Cheryl Saunders  
Lisa & Douglas Savige - in memory of Diane Moseley  
Lynne Sherwood  
Craig Thomas & Graeme Moody  
Raymond Wilkinson  
Robert and Diana Wilson  
Secret Admirers (2)

### Silver Patrons (\$1,000+)

Joanna Baevski  
Dr Zita Ballok  
Russell Waters & Marissa Barter-Waters  
Laurie Bebbington & Elizabeth O'Keeffe  
Cheryl R. Benson  
David Bernshaw & Caroline Isakow  
Shirley Breese  
Stuart Brown & Lisa Banks  
Andrew Buchanan & Peter Darcy  
Diana Burleigh  
The Hon David Byrne  
Susanne Dahn AM  
Elise Callander  
Margaret Cash  
Paul & Sherly Coughlin  
Beatrice & Richard Donkin  
Mark Duckworth PSM and Lauren Mosso  
Charles Edmonds  
Dr Ian Eilenberg  
Professor David Forrest  
Dr Marguerite Hancock  
Anne Houlihan  
Dr Irene Irvine & Prof Iain Wallace  
Simon L Jackson & Brian Warburton  
Jessica Jasper  
Mary Kehoe and Graham McCallum  
Dr Peter Kingsbury  
Angela & Richard Kirsner  
Dr Kathy Laster  
Joan Lefroy AM & George Lefroy AM  
Selina Lightfoot  
Jane Lowther  
Prof Helmut & Gillian Lueckenhausen  
Ian Manning & Alice De Jonge  
Ian Marshman AM & Judi Marshman  
Margaret Mayers  
Rosemary Meagher  
Lawrence McDonald & Christian Klettner  
Anne McLean  
Andrew & Jocelyn McLeish

Campell & Christine Penfold  
Jude Munro AO & Louise Kummrow  
Dr Paul Nisselle AM & Sue Nisselle  
Merlyn Quaife AM  
Dr Garry Joslin & Prof. Dimity Reed AM  
Michael Riordan & Geoffrey Bush - Coote  
Robert Sanderson  
Sparky Foundation  
Libby Smith & John Middleton  
James & Anne Syme  
Rosemary & Dr Alan Tait  
Caroline Travers OAM & Richard Travers OAM  
Christina Turner  
Ian Watts OAM  
Margot & the late Richard Welton  
Ann & Alan Wilkinson  
Admirers (3)

### Bronze Patrons (\$500+)

Dennis Altman AM  
Jenny Anderson  
Margaret Astbury  
Lesley Bawden  
Pamela Baker  
Jan Begg  
Ines & Dr Donald Behrend  
Maura & Stephen Best  
David & Suzanne Browne  
Karin Butterfield  
Fiona Bunworth  
Robyn Byrne  
Malcolm & Melissa Carter  
Janice Cheng  
Vivienne Corcoran  
Dennis Freeman  
Alan Gunther  
Victoria Hayes  
Gillian Hoysted  
Suzanne Hume  
Eve Kolar  
Dr Shirley Lanning

Colin Gunther & Richard Laslett  
Roger & Louise Lemke  
Kristina & Bruce Macrae  
Mary & Paul Reid  
Dr Gideon & Barbara Shaw  
Colin Simson  
Dr Rosalyn Smith  
Hugh Taylor AC & Liz Taylor AM  
Teresa Tjia  
Dr Peter Valder  
Deborah Whithear  
Secret Admirers (8)

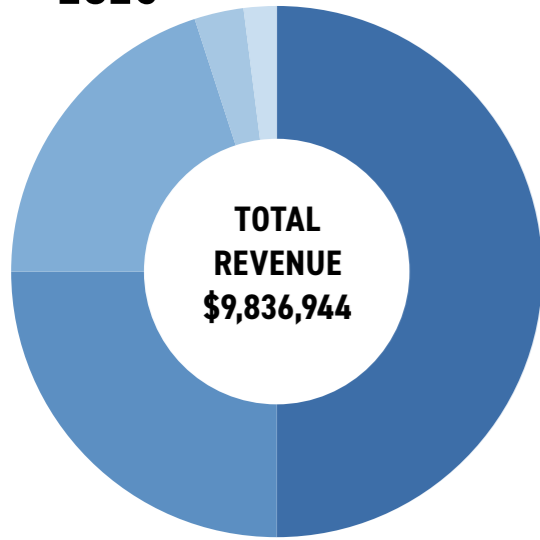
### Bequestors

Jenny Anderson  
Lesley Bawden  
Roger Chao  
Frank & Danielle Chamberlin  
Peter Hordern  
Peter Hourigan  
Jane Kunstler  
Richard Laslett & Colin Gunther  
Gregory J Reinhardt AM  
Chris & Helen Trueman  
Peter Turner  
Lorraine Weiner & Geoffrey Blick  
Tony Wildman & Robert Gibbs  
Secret Admirers (7)

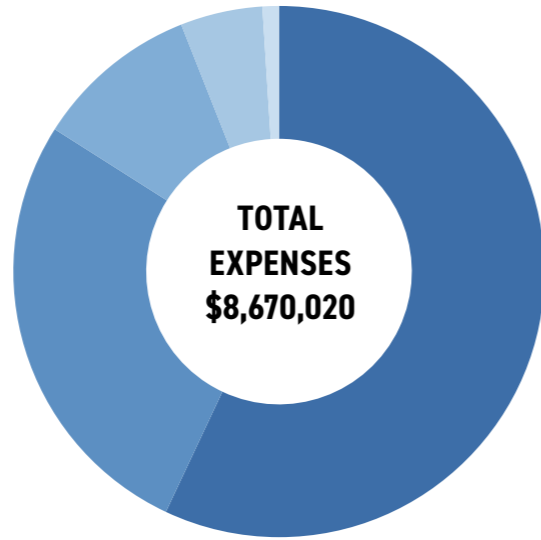
*All details current at time of printing.*

# FINANCIALS

2025

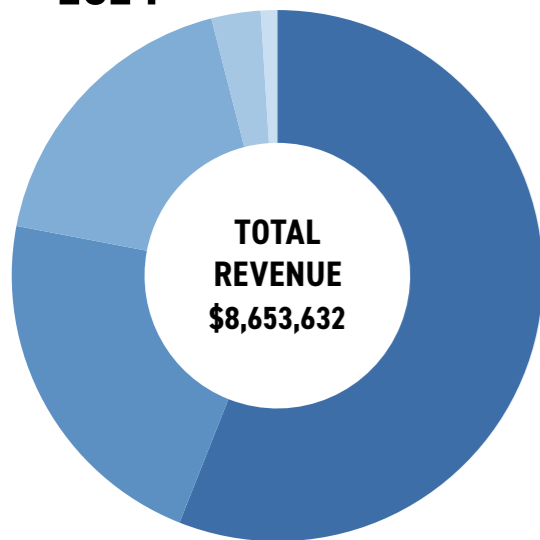


- Government funding **50%**
- Box office and performance **20%**
- Sponsorship, philanthropy and donation **25%**
- Other income **3%**
- Bequests income **2%**

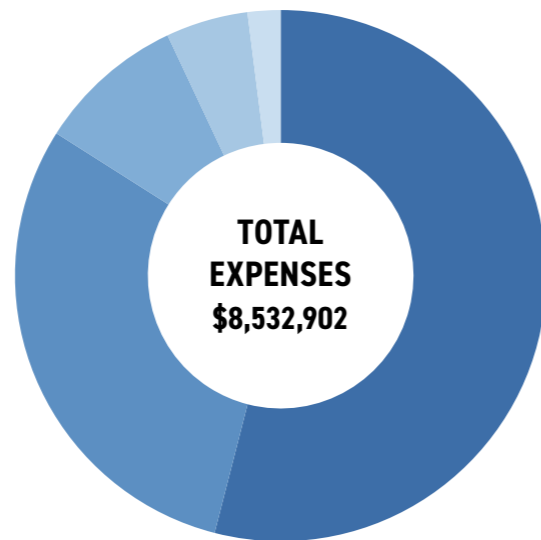


- Personnel (including artists and production staff) **57%**
- Production **27%**
- Administrative **10%**
- Marketing and Development **5%**
- Finance leases interest expense **1%**

2024



- Government funding **56%**
- Box office and performance **22%**
- Sponsorship, philanthropy and donation **18%**
- Other income **3%**
- Bequests income **1%**



- Personnel (including artists and production staff) **54%**
- Production **30%**
- Administrative **9%**
- Marketing and Development **5%**
- Finance leases interest expense **2%**

# OUR PARTNERS

We acknowledge and thank our partners who make our work possible

## GOVERNMENT PARTNERS



## FOUNDATION PARTNER



## UNIVERSITY PARTNER



## OPERA PRIZE SYNDICATE

**Founding Patrons:**  
**Dr Michael Stubbs & Malcolm Roberts**  
 Dame Carol Colburn Grigor DBE  
 Mary Davidson and family of the late Frederick R Davidson AM  
 Jane Lowther  
 Joy Selby Smith  
 Professor Emeritus Barbara van Ernst AM

## TRUSTS AND FOUNDATIONS



## MAJOR PARTNERS



## MEDIA PARTNERS



## SUPPLY PARTNERS



## OFFICIAL PARTNER



## PERFORMANCE PARTNERS



# VICTORIAN OPERA

VICTORIANOPERA.COM.AU

