Welcome to tonight’s performance of Aida by Guiseppe Verdi. Opera Society is delighted to continue its support of Opera Australia and align as production partner of this much-loved opera.

Opera Society is a not-for-profit organisation committing its resources to the promotion of Opera Australia in Victoria and its young singers. In association with the Melba Opera Trust, the Society sponsors an annual scholarship, and in 2021 also supports two artists with Opera Australia. These provide an excellent basis for the singers’ career prospects.

Membership of Opera Society is available to all opera lovers from beginners to long-time devotees. Members enjoy stimulating social events at which they are able to learn about interpretation and production and meet like-minded new friends.

Opera Society is run entirely by a dedicated band of members donating many hours of their leisure time. Their labour is entirely voluntary but they provide services at a premium professional level.

So if you have enjoyed tonight’s incredible performance of Aida, do consider joining us to become part of the wider Opera Family while supporting this beautiful, exciting and addictive art form. Visit our website at operasociety.org.au
Aida

Composer
Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)
Librettist
Antonio Ghislanzoni (1824-1893)

Conductor
Tahu Matheson
Director & Choreographer
Davide Livermore
Revival Director
Shane Placentino
Assistant Director
Shaun Rennie
Set Designer
Giò Forma
Costume Designer
Gianluca Falaschi
Lighting Designer
John Rayment
Digital Content Designer
D-Wok

Aida
Leah Crocetto
Amneris
Elena Gabouri
Radames
Stefano La Colla
Amonasro
Michael Honeyman
Ramfis
Alexander Vinogradov
David Parkin (May 15)
The King
Gennadi Dubinsky
High Priestess
Jane Ede
Messenger
Dean Bassett

Opera Australia Chorus
Chorus Master
Paul Fitzsimon
Assistant Chorus Master
Michael Curtain

Opera Australia Dancers

Opera Australia Actors

Orchestra Victoria
Concertmaster
Sulki Yu

State Theatre,
Arts Centre Melbourne

Performance dates
6, 8, 10, 12, 15, 17, 19, 21 May

Running time:
approximately 2 hours and 50 minutes, including one interval.

Thank you to our Donors
Paul Fitzsimon is supported by
Ina Bornkessel-Schlesewsky and Matthias Schlesewsky

You are welcome to take photos of yourself in the theatre at interval, but you may not photograph, film or record the performance.

Cover Photo © Prudence Upton
Tahu Matheson - Conductor
Tahu has worked for Opera Australia since 2007 and in 2017 became Head of Music for the company. The accomplished pianist has conducted Opera Australia productions of L’Elisir d’Amore, Turandot, La Bohème, Carmen, The Magic Flute, Tosca, Whiteley and The Pearlfishers and The Seven Deadly Sins for Victorian Opera. Tahu has also conducted concerts internationally including the premier of Nelson, by Stuart Greenbaum in London.

Davide Livermore - Director
Davide Livermore has forged his outstanding award-winning career on the main stages of Europe, America and Australia. For over two decades he has worked in the operatic industry as a director, designer, dancer and actor, and has also performed opera internationally with the best singers of our time. He has been Artistic Director of Teatro Baretti, Centre de Perfeccionamiento Plácido Domingo, and Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia. His Opera Australia credits include Attila and Anna Bolena.

Shane Placentino - Revival Director
As a member of the Australian Ballet (1991–2000), Shane Placentino danced the full range of classical and contemporary repertoire and appeared in Graeme Murphy’s Nutcracker – The Story of Clara and Beyond Twelve before joining Sydney Dance Company (2002–2008). Shane was Assistant Director for Opera Australia’s Aida, Madama Butterfly and The Merry Widow (Murphy), Faust (David McVicar), and West Side Story on Sydney Harbour. He was Revival Director for John Bell’s Madama Butterfly (regional tour).

Shaun Rennie - Assistant Director
Shaun is an award-winning NIDA and RADA graduate director. He won the Broadway World Award for Best Direction of a Musical for his 2016 production of Rent at the Hayes Theatre and has received three Sydney Theatre Award nominations for Best Director. Recent highlights include The Rise and Fall of Little Voice (Darlinghurst Theatre Company), and the Australian premieres of Jess and Joe Forever (25A, Downstairs Belvoir) and Tennessee Williams’ Baby Doll (The Ensemble Theatre Company).

Giò Forma - Set Designer
Award-winning studio Giò Forma was founded in 1998 by Christiana Picco, Florian Boje and Claudio Santucci. Along with dynamic architectural landmarks, fashion events, concerts and exhibits, Giò Forma creates cutting edge production designs for opera under the direction of Davide Livermore. Their set designs have appeared on stages in Valencia (L’Otello), Madrid (La Norma) San Paolo (Falstaff), Milan (Don Pasquale, Attila), Italy (Manon Lescaut) Moscow (Ballo in Maschera), and Monte Carlo (Adriana Lecouvreur).

Gianluca Falaschi - Costume Designer
Award-winning Italian costume designer Gianluca Falaschi has worked prolifically in theatre, opera, ballet and cinema. His operatic debut was Puccini’s The Triptych at Teatro Comunale in Modena. Since then, his ongoing artistic collaboration with director Davide Livermore has seen him work on productions including Don Pasquale and Attila (Teatro alla Scala), Adriana Lecouvreur (Opera di Montecarlo), and Tosca (Teatro Carlo Felice). Gianluca has also designed costumes for more than 100 plays internationally.

John Rayment - Lighting Designer
John Rayment has spent nearly 40 years designing lighting for projects that range from solo recitals to mass spectacle, from opera to entire cityscapes. His work for Opera Australia includes Das Rheingold, Die Walküre, Anna Bolena, Whiteley, Metamorphosis, Ghost Sonata, Aida, La Bohème, Salome, Orpheus in the Underworld, Lulu, Parsifal, and Two Weddings, One Bride, as well as the Sydney Harbour productions of La Traviata (2012, 2021), Carmen (2013, 2017) and West Side Story (2018).

D-Wok - Digital Content Designer
D-Wok is an entertainment design company specialising in interactive and innovative digital formats for events and performances. Using digital mapping and new technologies, D-Wok creates virtual sets and scenery for operas internationally. Since 2015, D-Wok has supervised content and video direction for Norma (Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia), La Bohème (Terme di Caracalla), and Falstaff (Theatro Municipal de São Paulo). Opera Australia credits include Attila (co-production with Teatro alla Scala) and Anna Bolena.

Paul Fitzsimon - Chorus Master
Chorus Master at Opera Australia since 2019. He has conducted all the symphony orchestras in Australia and recent highlights with OA include the national tour of Madama Butterfly. Brian Howard’s Metamorphosis, and The Merry Widow. In Europe he has conducted the Hamburg Ballet, Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra, and Ensemble Intercontemporain in Paris. Paul was Assistant Conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra before completing his orchestral conducting studies at the Universität der Künste in Berlin.

Sulki Yu - Concertmaster
Sulki Yu is a critically acclaimed violinist, having appeared as a soloist with orchestras including the Royal Flemish Philharmonic, Orchestre Nationale de Lille, Budapest Symphony, Moscow State Academic Symphony, and Royal Wallonie Chamber Orchestra. She won the 2006 Yehudi Menuhin and the 2007 Szegi–Hubay International Violin Competitions, and is a founding member of the highly awarded Fournier Trio. Prior to Orchestra Victoria, Sulki served as Principal First Violin at the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in London.
Leah Crocetto - Aida
American soprano Leah Crocetto makes her Opera Australia debut in the title role of Aida, a role she has also performed with Washington National Opera and Seattle Opera. She is heralded by The New York Times as possessing an “agile coloratura technique… with warmth, full penetrating sound and tenderness.” Credits include Leonora in Il Trovatore (Seattle Opera), Desdemona in Otello (Teatro la Fenice), Liu in Turandot (Francisco Opera) and the title role in Tosca (Pittsburgh Opera).

Elena Gabouri - Amneris
Elena returns to Australia to reprise her critically acclaimed role as Amneris. The dramatic mezzo soprano launched her international career in 2012 with a performance of Amneris at the Arena di Verona, and has since performed the role in Turkey, South Korea, Greece and the US. Her repertoire also includes Azucena in Verdi’s Il Trovatore, Ulrica in Verdi’s A Masked Ball, and contemporary roles such as Irma in Le Balcon (Besançon Opera and Dijon Opera, France).

Stefano La Colla - Radames
After a glamorous debut in 2015 at Teatro alla Scala as Calaf in Turandot under the baton of conductor Riccardo Chailly, Stefano has had a successful career. That same season, he was invited back to La Scala for Cavalleria Rusticana. In 2017 he made his USA debut at Lyric Opera of Chicago, performing in Turandot to great critical acclaim. Recent highlights include La Gioconda in Barcelona and Brussels, and Il Trovatore at Staatsoper Berlin.

Michael Honeyman - Amonasro
Michael Honeyman’s leading roles with Opera Australia include the title roles in Wozzeck (Helpmann Award), King Roger (Green Room Award), and Simon Boccanegra, as well as performances as Valentin (Faust), Escamillo (Carmen), Ford (Falstaff), Di Luna (Il Trovatore), Donner (Das Rheingold), Amfortas (Parsifal), Germont (La Traviata), Sharpless (Madama Butterfly) and Escamillo in Carmen on Sydney Harbour. Michael has also performed for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Brisbane Festival, and the State Opera of South Australia.

Alexander Vinogradov - Ramfis
After his debut at Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow at the age of 21, Alexander Vinogradov began an acclaimed career performing in world-leading opera houses. Among his most celebrated performances are Roméo et Juliette at Teatro alla Scala, Lucia di Lammermoor and Luisa Miller at Metropolitan Opera, and Don Carlo at Los Angeles Opera. Alexander has performed his most successful role, Escamillo in Carmen, at Metropolitan Opera New York, Staatsoper Munich, and London’s Royal Opera House.

David Parkin - Ramfis
In 2006, bass David Parkin won Operatunity Oz, which led to scholarship studies in Vienna as well as in Australia and his stage debut with the Vienna State Opera. As an Opera Australia principal, his roles have included Colline (La Bohéme), Ramfis (Aida), Sparafucile (Rigoletto) and Don Basilio (The Barber of Seville). He has appeared with all the Australian state opera companies and Pinchgut Opera, and with the Melbourne, Queensland and West Australian symphony orchestras.

Gennadi Dubinsky - The King
Accomplished Russian bass Gennadi Dubinsky was a soloist in Moscow in the 1980s before moving to Australia to continue his international career. Select Opera Australia credits include Ramphis and the King in Aida, Lorenzo in I Capuleti e i Montecchi, the Priest in Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk, the Bonze in Madama Butterfly, Monterone in Rigoletto, and Doctor Grevil in La Traviata. Gennadi has toured shows to Russia and Turkey and has performed concerts on radio and television.

Jane Ede - High Priestess
One of Australia’s most versatile sopranos, Jane Ede has been a principal soprano with Opera Australia since 2010, performing a wide-ranging repertoire of roles. Recent highlights have included Fiordiligi (Cosi fan tutte), Countess (The Marriage of Figaro), Frasquita (Carmen, including Carmen on Sydney Harbour), Donna Elvira (Don Giovanni), Pat Nixon (The Nixon Tapes) and Musetta (La Bohéme). This year she will reprise the role of Wellgunde and sing Gerhilde in Wagner’s Ring Cycle in Brisbane.

Dean Bassett - Messenger
Australian singer Dean Bassett worked as an Avionics Technician in the RAAF before studying at the Sydney Conservatorium and becoming a full-time member of the Opera Australia Chorus in 2004. Since then, he has performed in over 30 different operas in roles including the First Armoured Man in Die Zauberflöte, Official Registrar in Madama Butterfly, First Knight in Parsifal, Herald in Rinaldo and Second Priest in Die Zauberflöte.
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Yi Wang
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Tomomi Brennan
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Erica Kennedy
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CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF SHOWCASING THE ARTS
**Act 1: The Royal Palace at Memphis**
The Ethiopian army threatens Egypt. Radamès hopes he will be chosen as the hero to lead Egypt into battle. He hopes to return victorious and win the hand of Aida, an Ethiopian slave who is handmaiden to Princess Amneris, and secretly, daughter of the Ethiopian King.

The King enters and announces that the goddess Isis has chosen Radamès as the Egyptian commander-in-chief. Amneris presents a standard to Radamès and urges him to return as conqueror. She secretly loves Radamès but suspects he prefers Aida.

Radamès leaves for the temple to be consecrated for battle.

**Temple of Vulcan**
Priests and priestesses perform sacred rites to bless Radamès for war and victory.

**Act 2: Amneris’ apartments**
Amneris and her ladies-in-waiting prepare for Radamès’ triumphal return. When Aida approaches, Amneris tricks her, saying Radamès has been killed. Aida’s misery, and then joy when Amneris admits her lie, confirm Amneris’ suspicions and she now declares herself the rival of a mere slave. Aida pleads in vain for a chance for love with Radamès.

**Thebes**
Soldiers return in triumphal procession, bearing spoils of war. Amneris crowns Radamès victor and the King offers him any reward he desires.

Radamès asks for the freedom of the Ethiopian prisoners of war. Aida recognises her father, King Amonasro among them, but he tells the Pharoah that Amonasro died on the battlefield.

The Egyptian King frees the prisoners but keeps Aida and Amonasro as hostages. He offers Radamès Amneris’ hand in marriage.

**Act 3: The banks of the Nile**
Amneris goes to the temple to pray. Aida is nearby, awaiting a last meeting with Radamès. Her father appears and demands she help him discover Radamès’ plans to invade Ethiopia. Aida reluctantly agrees.

When Radamès arrives, she suggests they flee Egypt. Aida asks which path they should take to avoid the Egyptian troops. He tells her, whereupon Amonasro steps forward triumphantly and declares himself the Ethiopian king. Amneris and Ramfis emerge from the temple. Aida and Amonasro escape, and the devastated Radamès surrenders his sword to the High Priest.

**Act 4: The Temple of Vulcan**
Amneris summons Radamès and pleads with him to declare his innocence. She offers love and the throne if he vows never to see Aida again. Radamès refuses and is led away to trial. Three times Ramfis accuses Radamès of treason. Radamès is silent. He is sentenced to be buried alive. Amneris curses Ramfis and the priests.

Radamès has been left to die under the altar. He sees a form and thinks it is a vision, but it is Aida who has come to die with him. Together they bid farewell to earth while, above them, Amneris prays that the gods may grant eternal peace to Radamès.
Who was the composer?

Giuseppe Verdi was one of the greatest composers the world has ever seen, dominating the Italian opera scene for most of his adult lifetime.

He had a gift for taking a character marginalised by society and putting them centre stage, whether it be a hunchbacked jester in Rigoletto, an enslaved Ethiopian princess in Aida or a courtesan in La Traviata.

Verdi wrote big, beautiful melodies and expressive, dramatic orchestral music.

The composer was born in a small village in Parma in 1813 to a poor family. He became a music teacher and conductor before finding success as an opera composer. By the time he died in 1901, his fame was such that 300,000 people lined the streets to pay their respects as his coffin was taken to its final resting place.

What's the big hit?

The Triumphal March in Act II — big, bold and brassy, this glorious tune celebrates the Egyptian triumph over the Ethiopians in war. It’s one of the most famous pieces of classical music in the world.

Something to listen out for

You’ll know you're listening to the Triumphal March the instant it begins: a sonorous, glorious mass of trumpets and voices. Using a martial, war-like rhythm, Verdi layers brass upon brass, and the melodic line rises, getting steadily louder until the Chorus joins in a wall of magnificent sound: “Glory to Isis!”

There is no authentic sampling of Egyptian or African tunes in the score — Verdi creates an Eastern “feel” at the end of Act 1 in the harps, and again in the famous Nile scene, where a flute plays a rippling melody line, rising in trills and leaps.

(Spoiler alert!) Entombed beneath the earth, as the lovers fade away, the music also seems to fade out, with the orchestra getting softer and softer as they perish.

A little history

Accustomed to receiving commissions from Paris and Milan, Verdi must have found it refreshing to receive a request from the Khedive of Egypt for a new opera to celebrate the opening of the Khedivial Opera House. As Verdi cast around for a subject, French librettist Camille du Locle suggested a story set in Ancient Egypt, sending the veteran composer a synopsis written by the Egyptologist August Mariette Bey. Verdi was intrigued, both by the story and the hand that wrote it. Mariette would end up having a significant role in Aida — overseeing designs for sets and costumes.

Du Locle composed a French libretto, but Verdi, still burned from the difficult experience of writing Don Carlos for the Paris Opera, decided it should be in Italian. He hired a journalist, Antonio Ghislanzoni, to translate it into Italian. With a libretto in hand, Verdi composed the music in just four months.

As it turned out, delays beyond Verdi’s control meant that Aida was not ready for the opening of the new house — Rigoletto was performed instead. But two years later, Aida premiered in Cairo in December, 1871 and in Milan a few months later. Verdi did not attend the Cairo première, but directed the Milan performance. It was a resounding success — the audience called him back to the stage thirty-two times with thunderous applause! He was gifted an ivory baton, and a star made of diamonds with the name of Aida spelled out in rubies.

Aida fast became a staple of the operatic canon, and today is often the subject of lavish outdoor performances.

Conversation starters

• More than 50 years after Aida premiered, archaeologists uncovered two horns in the tomb of King Tutankhamen — one tuned to A-flat, the other in B — two keys which feature prominently in Verdi’s Triumphal March.

• Verdi actually commissioned special trumpets for the Aida orchestra, made in Milan to resemble the long, straight Egyptian form.

• Elton John composed a stage musical of Aida, with lyrics by Tim Rice, in 1998.
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We sincerely thank our Wagner 2021 donors for their incredible financial support. Presenting a Ring Cycle is a massive undertaking for any opera company and we are extremely grateful for the generous donations from our 2021 Syndicate members, which have made this new production possible. The Ring Cycle will be performed in Brisbane from 29th October until 20th November 2021, featuring a cast of international stars and a spectacular new production by Chinese director Chen Shi-Zheng.

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