

MEDIA RELEASE

5 November 2020

Opera Australia announces a return to the Sydney Opera House in January 2021

Opera Australia will return to the Joan Sutherland Theatre stage for the first time since the coronavirus shut down its 2020 season in March, today announcing a three-month COVID-safe season that includes two productions never before performed by the Company.

Due to open on 5 January 2021 after a hiatus of more than nine months, Australia's largest performing arts company will emerge from the COVID-19 crisis as a more flexible organisation. Having taken a devastating financial hit, the Company is keen to expand its program to a broader audience, while staying true to its loyal subscribers and supporters, presenting some of the world's finest opera productions.

OA's Artistic Director Lyndon Terracini said the impact the pandemic has had on the performers and the industry shouldn't be underestimated, but he is glad there is finally something for everyone to look forward to.

"It's incredibly exciting to finally be announcing a season after the year we've had. It's been really difficult but everyone has worked so hard to get us to this point where we can confidently move forward with our plans for the start of 2021.

"The pandemic forced us to rethink how we structure the company and program our seasons, not just for 2021 but potentially for years to come, and still maintain our commitment to artistic integrity. We have to adapt or risk the very future of the Company," said Terracini.

Announcing only the summer season for the Sydney Opera House, Terracini outlined the Company's new approach to programming.

"Given that we really just don't know what impacts this virus will have in the coming months, we've decided to announce each of next year's seasons in stages to minimise the risks of having to make changes or cancellations. For now, we are announcing our first quarter Sydney Opera House performances, but we will have other exciting projects to reveal in the coming weeks and months.

"Working within the confines of the COVID-safe restrictions, we're able to present a season that will have broad appeal. First-timers will love Lehár's fabulous operetta *The Merry Widow* and Puccini's *Tosca*. Aficionados who love grand opera of the highest order will be swept away by Verdi's *Ernani*, and for good measure we've thrown in an operatic curve ball with Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*.

"I'm particularly thrilled to be bringing *Ernani* to Australia. It's the second co-production we've done with Teatro alla Scala after the tremendous success of *Attila* earlier this year. We've managed to secure some of the world's best singers to play alongside two of Australia's finest, Diego Torre and Natalie Aroyan. It was the most popular of Verdi's early works so it's way overdue for its Opera House premiere."

Working closely with the Sydney Opera House, the 2021 summer season will be operating within a COVID-safe environment, ensuring the health and wellbeing of both audience members and all performers is the highest priority.

The following measures have been introduced at the Sydney Opera House:

- Reduced venue capacities (50%) and physically-distanced theatre seating (a minimum of one empty seat between groups).
- Regular cleaning of high-traffic and high-touch areas with hospital-grade disinfectant.
- Hand sanitiser stations in frequently accessed areas and near bathroom facilities.
- COVID-19 safety training for all operational, frontline and contract staff, as well as on-site COVID-19 Safe Hygiene Marshals.

LEHÁR: *The Merry Widow* | Conductor **Brian Castles-Onion** and **Paul Fitzsimon** | Director **Graeme Murphy**

Opera Australia is diving into decadence opening the 2021 season on 5 January with Lehár's fun and frivolous operetta *The Merry Widow*. Directed by Graeme Murphy, this charming show is a light-hearted event with spirited choreography, stunning costumes and soaring melodies. Following acclaimed performances in *West Wide Story* on Sydney Harbour, soprano Julie Lea Goodwin and tenor Alexander Lewis will reunite to play former lovers Hanna Glavari and Danilo Danilovich. They will lead an all Australian cast including Stacey Alleaume and David Whitney under the baton of Brian Castles-Onion and Paul Fitzsimon. The glitz and glamour of art deco France will come alive on the Joan Sutherland Theatre stage thanks to the creative dream team that is director/choreographer Graeme Murphy, set designer Michael Scott-Mitchell and costume designer Jennifer Irwin. With its stunning visuals, lively dance numbers and elegant romance *The Merry Widow* is the perfect show to kick off 2021.

Sydney Opera House, January 5 – 16.

VERDI: *Ernani* | Conductor **Renato Palumbo** | Director **Sven-Eric Bechtolf**

Following *The Merry Widow* will be the Opera Australia premiere of Verdi's *Ernani* opening on 2 February. A co-production with Teatro alla Scala, this premiere also marks the first time this opera has ever been performed at the Sydney Opera House. Part of Verdi's early repertoire and based on the play by Victor Hugo, *Ernani* tells the story of a former Don turned outlaw whose desire to be with the woman he loves is outweighed only by his duty to honour a vow he once made. This rarely performed opera requires an extremely talented cast to tackle the demanding roles. Celebrated tenor Diego Torre will make his role debut as Ernani starring opposite highly regarded Verdian soprano Natalie Aroyan, also making her role debut, as Elvira. Performing alongside them will be two powerhouse singers and internationally renowned interpreters of the roles; baritone Vladimir Stoyanov as Don Carlo, King of Spain and bass Vitalij Kowaljow as Don Ruy Gomez de Silva. **Sydney Opera House, February 2 – 13.**

PUCCHINI: *Tosca* | Conductor **Andrea Battistoni** | Director **John Bell**

Described as a "...triumph for Opera Australia" (The Daily Telegraph) John Bell's production of Puccini's *Tosca* will return to the Sydney Opera House on 22 February. In this production, Bell keeps the opera's original setting in Rome, but moves the date from 1800 to 1943. Instead of Napoleon's army occupying the city, it is the Nazis. The transition brings the story forward into an era that resonates with audiences today. Baritone Marco Vratogna who enjoyed great success performing as Iago in *Otello* opposite Jonas Kaufmann, will reprise his role as one of the world's greatest operatic villains Scarpia. Soprano Carmen Giannattasio, known for her lustrous voice and dramatic ability, is set to give a spell-binding performance in the titular role. Tenor Diego Torre will perform his second leading role for the Sydney summer season as *Tosca*'s lover Cavaradossi; a role for which he received widespread praise in 2017.

Sydney Opera House, February 22 – March 13.

BARTÓK: *Bluebeard's Castle* | Conductor **Andrea Molino** | Director **Andy Morton**

Rounding out OA's Sydney summer season is an all new production of Béla Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*. Based on a French folk tale, this one-act Hungarian opera demands two commanding singers and bass Daniel Sumegi and mezzo-soprano Carmen Topciu are equal to the task. This haunting new production by Andy Morton perfectly captures the suspense and suspicion and will leave audiences with a lingering sense of unrest. **Sydney Opera House, March 1 - 10.**

Great Opera Hits

In addition to the mainstage productions, Opera Australia is delighted to announce the return of the ever popular *Great Opera Hits*. The perfect introduction to opera and a great night out for those wanting to enjoy all the classics, this 90 minute show features the world's most famous arias by Bizet, Puccini, Rossini and Verdi. Hosted by Guy Noble and performed by some of Australia's finest singers, *Great Opera Hits* is a fantastic way to experience the Sydney Opera House and the art form in all of its glory. **Sydney Opera House, January 3, 4, 10, 11, 17, 26. February 3, 5.**

BOOKINGS

Opera Australia Box Office | 02 9318 8200 | opera.org.au
General public tickets on sale 19 November 2020

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