

**MEDIA RELEASE**

21 January 2021

# Opera Australia leading the industry in COVID-safe performing practices

In an effort to provide a COVID-safe work environment and significantly reduce the risk of coronavirus transmission, Opera Australia is the first performing arts company in Australia to introduce **rapid antigen testing**, as a key element of their program to keep performers and staff safe from the virus.

As the only major opera company in the world currently performing to a live audience, OA made a triumphant return to the Joan Sutherland Theatre earlier this month with a two-week season of *The Merry Widow*, and declared their innovative COVID-safe plan was a resounding success.

Unlike PCR testing which can take up to 48 hours for results, rapid antigen testing provides results in just 15 minutes. The entire cast and orchestra, which equates to almost 100 performers, are being tested as frequently as every three days as part of OA's comprehensive COVID Safety Plan, a move that was integral in facilitating the Company's safe return to the stage for its summer season.

Rapid antigen testing is currently being conducted at the Sydney Opera House, where the cast of the new production of Verdi's *Ernani* are in the final stages of rehearsal ahead of its premiere on Tuesday 2 February, and at OA's headquarters in Surry Hills, where performers are rehearsing for the upcoming production of *Tosca* that opens on 22 February.

OA is working with respected epidemiologist and public health consultant Dr Henning Liljeqvist and bio-safety expert Dr Bill Anseline's health and safety management company, Hemisphere Biosecurity, to develop and implement the testing program that meets government and public health requirements and recommendations.

OA's Artistic Director Lyndon Terracini labelled the testing regime 'gold standard'.

"With so much uncertainty surrounding recent outbreaks, for us to safely return to performing it was vital that we engaged experts to help guide us through the quagmire of COVID-safe practices, amid a constantly changing environment.

"Dr Anseline's company is at the forefront of best practice solutions, with a focus on the specific requirements the arts and entertainment industries need to function, and it was clear the rapid antigen testing was the way forward for us," said Terracini.

Medical Director for Hemisphere Biosecurity, Dr Anseline said "our focus should be on providing bespoke novel ways to integrate knowledge and expertise around infectious disease prevention, training and management which incorporates "end-to-end" solutions.

"A significant part of our future challenge involves aligning people, processes and technology to safely help in the reopening of industries like the arts, entertainment, agriculture, hospitality and tourism," said Dr Anseline.

Under the advice of Dr Henning, Hemisphere Biosecurity is facilitating asymptomatic testing and is making test data available to public health authorities for inclusion in the NSW daily testing tally.

Asymptomatic testing not only increases the safety for OA and its patrons, but for the whole community. Knowing that the virus can be transmitted by asymptomatic people, this testing increases the chances of detecting cases in the community.

In the event of a positive result, protocols are in place to notify NSW Health and follow its directions. Additionally, there are health screening systems in place to exclude anyone who experiences symptoms.

**Media Notes:**

**Dr TG Henning Liljeqvist** is a public health consultant and epidemiologist.

**Dr Bill Anseline** is Medical Director for Hemisphere Biosecurity and is a Senior Lecturer of Clinical Medicine at Griffith University, Gold Coast.

**Hemisphere Biosecurity** specialises in COVID-safe practices, providing integrated solutions through education, training and prevention management in the arts, entertainment, agriculture, hospitality and tourism industries. [www.thehemispheregroup.com](http://www.thehemispheregroup.com)

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