

VICTORIAN OPERA

ANNUAL REPORT 2018



Our Artistic Vision

OPERA. It's a word grounded in tradition and heritage. When most people hear the term they imagine melodrama, grand theatres and storied composers. And then quite often they think of a time gone by, a museum piece art form.

But not for us.

When we think about opera, our gaze is fixed to the future. When it comes to opera, we believe the best days lie ahead.

Because for a world that's staring at screens, we prescribe the stage.

The night out.

The live moment.

And the unique magic of a community who are together as music soars.

We believe in the unlimited potential of this art form to move people, all people. To spark conversation, to help us understand one another and to remind us of what it means to be alive and to live in a vibrant cultural city.

But that potential can only be realised if we throw out the rules and make opera for everyone. If we re-imagine the very idea of what opera can be and then start creating contemporary storytelling relevant to everyone in our community.

So if you think you know opera, think again. Because at Victorian Opera, we're just getting started.

Welcome

Based in Melbourne, Victorian Opera is a national leader in presenting unforgettable opera experiences.

As the state opera company of Victoria, we are committed to making creative and accessible opera for everyone, and evolving the art form in adventurous ways.

From opera diehards to first-timers, over 30,000 people experience our work annually through live performances, streamed events and activities in Victoria and Tasmania.

We premiere at least one new Australian work each year and have staged 22 new works since the company formed in 2005.

We employ hundreds of people across the creative industries, recruit some of the finest singers from Australia and around the world, and collaborate with Australia's leading companies, venues and learning institutions.

The next generation of talent is developed from the ground up through the Victorian Opera Youth Chorus Ensemble (VOYCE) and our innovative Access All Areas: Livestream Program. As part of our commitment to developing the art form, we also stage opera annually in Tasmania.

Recognised for our unique voice and contribution to the country's operatic landscape, Victorian Opera became an Australian Major Performing Arts company in 2019.



A Year of Encounters

Through diverse programming, key musical collaborations, and close associations with extraordinary Australian singers abroad, Victorian Opera was able to provide local and visiting audiences many encounters with the marvellous throughout Season 2018.

Our season opened in March with a centenary celebration of Norman Lindsay's classic, *The Magic Pudding*, in a return of our operatic adaptation by composer Calvin Bowman and librettist Anna Goldsworthy. Children and adults treasure this iconic Australian story, and our production brought joy and laughter to audiences in Melbourne, Wodonga, and Bendigo. As our Community and Youth Opera, the production was enhanced by the home-grown talents of singers of all ages in each location, including the Victorian Opera Youth Ensemble (VOYCE) for our Melbourne performances.

Primary school students and families were treated to a first taste of opera with Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, starring a cast of young singers who've long been nurtured within our company.

In July, Victorian Opera brought Rossini's *William Tell* back to the Australian stage for the first time in over 100 years for our season at the superbly restored Palais Theatre, St Kilda – a

venue which undoubtedly offers one of the best acoustics for opera in Australia. The epic proved our biggest production to date and united local and international talents for a dramatically pertinent night at the opera.

Our ongoing association with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra (TSO) brought Melbourne audiences an exceptional evening of music-making with our final Bellini opera in concert: *The Capulets and the Montagues*. Mezzo-soprano Caitlin Hulcup made a triumphant and long-overdue debut in her hometown as Romeo alongside star soprano Jessica Pratt's Giulietta.

We returned to the Palais Theatre in October with a French opera of rare and otherworldly beauty; Debussy's only opera, *Pelleas and Melisande*. It was performed in association with the Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM) orchestra in honour of the 100th anniversary of the composer's death. Our all-Australian cast also marked important homecomings for our two leads; Angus Wood and Siobhan Stagg as Pelleas and Melisande. Both have proven themselves as serious artists on the world stage.

As our new Australian work for 2018, we proudly premiered our commission *Lorelei*.

A concept by soprano Ali McGregor, *Lorelei* was created by Julian Langdon, Casey Bennetto, and Gillian Cosgriff. Through examining the Lorelei mythology with a modern sensibility, the new opera hypnotically tapped into the zeitgeist. The cast of three, Ali McGregor, Antoinette Halloran and Dimity Shepherd, proved compelling sirens.

I congratulate all artists in Victorian Opera's Season 2018 for a year of outstanding and widely divergent musical achievements, and thank our 2018 artistic partners and venues: Arts Centre Melbourne, ANAM, Orchestra Victoria, Palais Theatre, Sydney Chamber Opera, TSO, and the University Of Melbourne who help us to reimagine the potential of opera, for everyone.

Dr Richard Mills AM
Artistic Director, Victorian Opera

Reimagining the potential of opera, for everyone

Triumphs and change characterised Victorian Opera's Season 2018; a year of artistic excellence, daring programming, and goodbyes.

Victorian Opera farewelled many important figures in the company's family, most notably Founding Music Director Richard Gill AO who passed away in October 2018. The public outpouring was felt across the nation, and his legacy within our company runs deep. Richard Gill's artistic vision, community spirit, and commitment to music education provided essential building blocks for Victorian Opera, visible many years after his seven-year tenure (2005 – 2012).

Following their many years of combined service to Victorian Opera and hard work championing our elevation to Major Performing Arts status, we also farewelled Jane Hemstritch and Andrew Snell; our former Chairman and Managing Director respectively. Their commitment to Victorian Opera enabled our company to thrive and enjoy much prosperity.

With the departure of Jane Hemstritch, I was proud to join Victorian Opera as the new Chairman and lead the organisation as it enters its next chapter transitioning to become a Major Performing Arts company.

Victorian Opera's artistic output soared to new heights in 2018 under Artistic Director Richard Mills; demonstrating the company's agility in staging both rarely-heard repertoire and new Australian works of the highest calibre.

The world premiere of new Australian opera *Lorelei* sold out five performances at The Coopers Malthouse, receiving acclaim from critics and audiences alike. We returned to the Palais Theatre, St Kilda for the presentation of two rarely-staged masterworks of French opera: Rossini's *William Tell*, and Debussy's only opera *Pelleas and Melisande*.

Victorian Opera's Season 2018 also resulted in the company's highest number of subscribers to date; a proud reflection of our clever programming, affordable packages and unequalled subscriber benefits. The company launched a compelling deal for subscribers aged 30-years and under with our unlimited Season Pass; a \$100 subscription enabling pass holders to attend every performance in Victorian Opera's season.

Inspiring younger audiences through exposure to opera is a key focus of our company, and the launch of Victorian Opera's Access All Areas: Livestream Program helped extend our reach even further. This pioneering program allowed the company to thoroughly introduce primary students to every aspect of staging an opera before they experienced a live performance of *Hansel and Gretel*; either at Arts Centre Melbourne or, for regional schools, livestreamed in class. This program was viewed livestreamed or on-demand by an audience of 5,720 students and teachers across Victoria.

Plans to relocate to a fit-for-purpose building in Laurens Street, West Melbourne proved unviable for the company in view of ensuring our long-term financial sustainability. While Victorian Opera remains at Horti Hall for the foreseeable future, we continue our search for a more appropriate home to accommodate the company's needs and its growth.

In 2018 the company recorded a significant increase in private philanthropic support and corporate sponsorship. Financial support from a variety of sources is paramount to our long-term sustainability and demonstrates our stakeholders' confidence in the work we do in the community.

Victorian Opera celebrates our many successes in 2018 together with our key supporters, who enabled our daring programming and ability to reimagine the potential of opera, for everyone. Our thanks to the Australia Council for the Arts, The State Government of Victoria through Creative Victoria, our long-standing Foundation partnership with the Robert Salzer Foundation, our Trusts and Foundations, Patrons, Corporate Partners, and audiences.

Genevieve Overell
Chairman, Victorian Opera

Productions in 2018



The Magic Pudding – The Opera

“They say the proof of the pudding is in the eating. In this case, the eating is nostalgic, fanciful and entirely satisfying.” ★★★★★
– *The Age*

Hansel and Gretel

“Continuing to educate the opera lovers of tomorrow, Victorian Opera once again strikes a deft balance between authentic opera and children’s entertainment”
– *Simon Parris: Man in Chair*

Rape of Lucretia

“This production is greatly successful in providing balance in this festival with “sex and death” as simply art, and “sex and death” as themes we must confront in reality.” ★★★★★½
– *Limelight*



Pelleas and Melisande

“The only shame is that there are only two performances of this astonishing and supremely executed opera.”
★★★★½
– *The Age*

“Victorian Opera’s new production is a triumph.”
– *The Australian*

Lorelei

“One of the many reasons Melbourne music-lovers are in debt to Victorian Opera is the company’s proud tradition of commissioning new works by local artists, but perhaps none has hit the mark so powerfully and successfully as its new ‘opera/cabaret’.”
★★★★½
– *The Age*

William Tell

“Lovers of the form are going to rush from all corners of the nation to join this fight.”
★★★★★
– *Time Out Melbourne*

“Victorian Opera has gone where other Australian companies fear to tread, and emerged all the better for it.”
★★★★★
– *Arts Hub*



The Capulets and the Montagues

“The first notes immediately marked this as a concert with class.”
★★★★★
– *Limelight*

“Pratt once again demonstrated a superb coloratura facility, gliding upwards with dazzling ease.”
– *The Australian*

Inspiring Audiences

Victorian Opera reached a national and international audience of

49,152

across

190

performances, activities and streamed events.

5,942

audience members for *William Tell* and *Pelleas and Melisande*.

4,146

audience members attended *The Magic Pudding - The Opera* in Melbourne, Bendigo and Wodonga.

5,720

audience members engaged with the newly created Access All Areas: Livestream program (live or on-demand).

SOLD OUT

5 performance of *Lorelei*



“Congratulations for putting on such a beautiful show (*Hansel and Gretel*). The kids and teachers were transfixed by the beautiful singing, costumes and sets.”

“Brilliant music, direction, singing and acting. Being so lively it kept even the tiniest member of the audience fascinated.” (*The Magic Pudding - The Opera*)

“The cast were all magnificent; the orchestra enchanting: it was a really superb performance. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Congratulations to all involved.” (*William Tell*)

“I have been attending Victorian Opera productions from the beginning and I think the company goes from strength to strength.”

“I am so happy that Vic Opera is commissioning new works. Some have been outstanding, and *Lorelei* was absolutely brilliant”

“I think you have surpassed my other opera provider, for which I’m also a subscriber, in terms of quality and re-envisaging performance. We always attend hoping, and now expecting, something out of the ordinary. To date we have not been disappointed.”

“I was so thrilled to see this new opera, and on the first night. The singers were superb, the story so real and compelling in its telling and application to life now.” (*Lorelei*)

“I had a wonderful evening! The orchestra were great, with such a prestigious conductor, and the choir were fabulous and the main singers were out of this world! All performing the most beautiful music. I was in seventh heaven! Thank you!” (*The Capulets and the Montagues*).



Education and the Community

Sharing the joy of singing is one of the great privileges of Victorian Opera. As part of our ongoing activities, this was achieved across the company’s Education and Community platforms in 2018.

The voice and power of community singing was celebrated at the opening of Victorian Opera’s season with *The Magic Pudding - The Opera*. Eighty-three community singers of all ages participated in this fun-filled, family opera in Melbourne, Wodonga, and Bendigo. As part of the experience, these special choruses attended several music and technical rehearsals before performing with a live orchestra and cast of professional opera singers.

Victorian Opera’s Youth Chorus Ensemble (VOYCE) welcomed 32 young singers, aged 13 – 20, in 2018. Meeting for weekly rehearsals on Tuesday nights under the guidance of Music Director Angus Grant and Victorian Opera music staff, repertoire ranged from Mozart’s *Idomeneo* to Bernstein’s *Candide*. VOYCE enjoyed

various performance opportunities throughout the year, including an annual showcase at Horti Hall and the Melbourne season of *The Magic Pudding - The Opera*.

In the last term for 2018, activities focused on preparing VOYCE for their appearance in 2019’s *Parsifal*, including German language studies and specialist guidance from contralto Liane Keegan.

Developing the next generation of opera singers was further explored through Victorian Opera’s association with the University of Melbourne. Young singers studying at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music joined the chorus for Rossini’s *William Tell* and worked closely with the company and cast to prepare for the production season.

In conjunction with Victorian Opera’s annual Education Production, *Hansel and Gretel*, the company launched a pioneering education initiative *Access All Areas: Livestream Program*. Victorian Opera livestreamed four weekly 45-minute workshops

introducing primary school students across Victoria to the fundamentals of opera, and what makes the art form unique. The successful interactive program encouraged questions in real-time from curious learners direct from their classrooms and was also supplemented with a comprehensive free downloadable Education Resource (available for all Victorian Opera productions).

Following the conclusion of this innovative Livestream Program, students attended a performance of *Hansel and Gretel* at the theatre or viewed the livestreamed performance in class. Initial feedback from Access All Areas indicated the program’s ability to connect with students state-wide, including the most remote areas. One teacher noted: “We now have students who are very interested in opera - who had never heard of opera before these sessions.”



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Our People

Putting on a Victorian Opera mainstage performance takes a large and talented group of people months of preparation – planning, building, painting, tailoring, coaching and rehearsing – to create an unforgettable night at the opera. In 2018, Victorian Opera engaged hundreds of people in the creative industry.

485

performers, musicians and creatives across

28

mainstage performances

92

directors, designers, technical and production staff.

236

performers including local singers, chorus members, international guests and young developing artists.

218

musicians including appearances from Orchestra Victoria, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and ANAM.



Victorian Opera Patrons

For the year 2018

If you would like to get more involved in the work of Victorian Opera by becoming a Patron, please contact Louise O'Loughlin, Development Manager via phone on (03) 9001 6405 or via email louise@victorianopera.com.au

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Secret Admirers (6)

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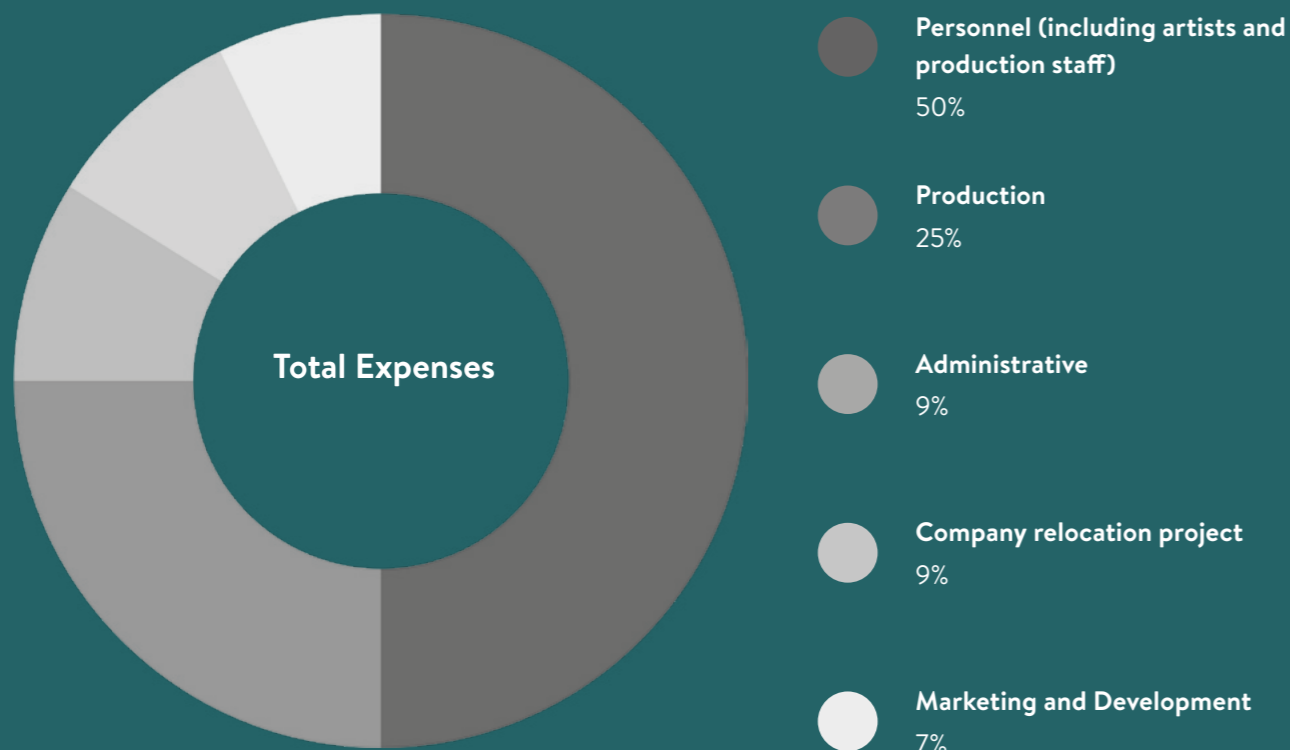
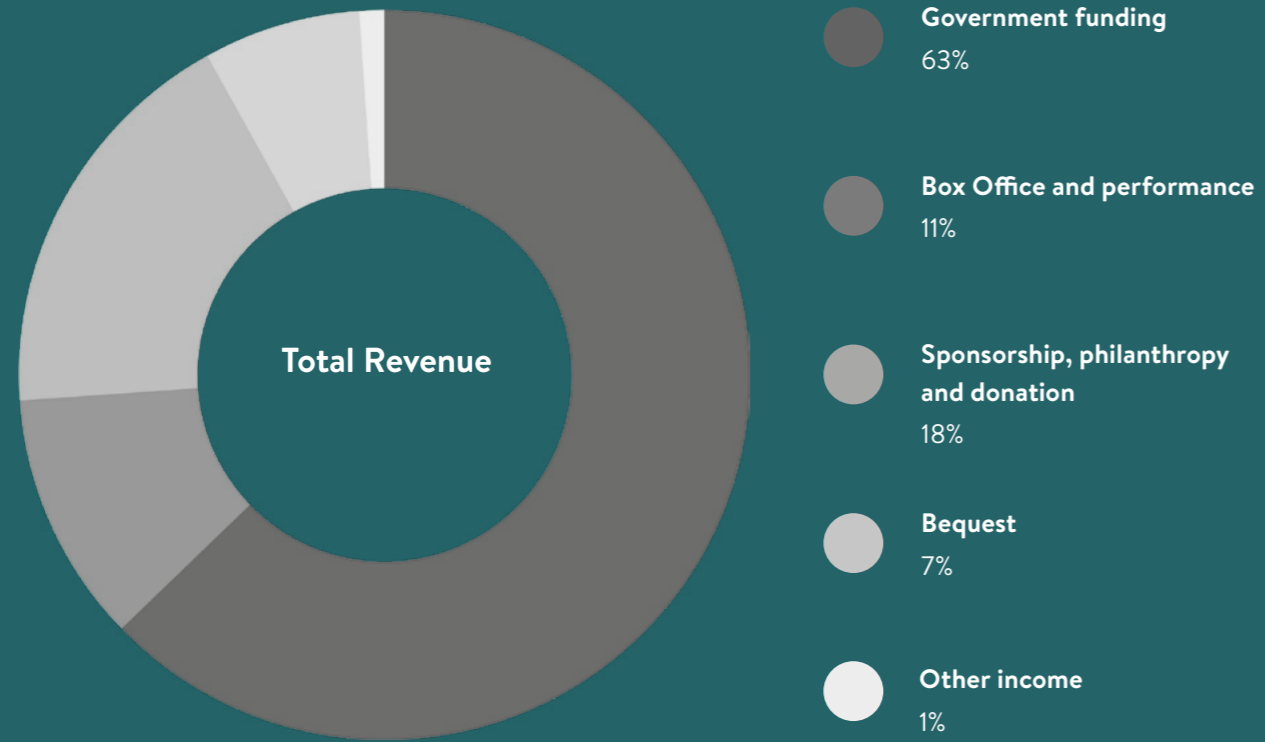
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Secret Admirers (3)

Bequests

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Graeme Bawden & Len de Kievit
Lesley Bawden
Frank & Danielle Chamberlin
Richard Laslett & Colin Gunther
Jane Kunstler
Dr Garry Joslin & Prof. Dimity Reed AM
Tony Wildman & Robert Gibbs
Secret Admirers (4)

Accounts



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Victorian Opera is supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria. Victorian Opera would also like to acknowledge, with great appreciation, the contribution of the partners listed on this page.

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