



VICTORIAN  
OPERA



**ANNUAL REPORT  
2022**

## CHAIR'S MESSAGE

With Victorian Opera's artistic vision 'to reimagine the potential of opera and musical theatre for everyone' firmly in mind, we commenced the year with great optimism and determination to deliver every production planned for Season 2022, no matter what challenges we encountered.

*The Who's Tommy* opened with huge excitement, enjoying critical and audience acclaim, and was our most attended mainstage production in 2022 – an outstanding outcome, particularly as the final performance had to be cancelled due to Covid. After waiting for 2 years to stage the production one audience member remarked "My husband and I love the music, grew up with it. Have had tickets to see it since 2020!", a reflection of the interest and love for this timeless rock opera by Melbourne audiences.

The full company, creatives and artists worked tirelessly to successfully present all remaining productions for the season, notwithstanding persistent and ongoing challenges. Reaching new audiences, our programme celebrated new Australian works, music theatre and Australian premieres, and spanned all genres from Rock 'n Roll to Rossini. A few highlights include...

*Elektra* was a sensational performance. This thrilling one-night-only, semi-staged concert needed no introduction to an audience determined to experience revered soprano Catherine Foster's dynamic presentation in the title role. A combination of Strauss' extraordinary music (with text based on Sophocles' Greek tragedy) and the stellar cast, accompanied by Orchestra Victoria with the very talented young ANAM Orchestra led by Maestro Richard Mills, ensured all enjoyed an enthralling evening of superb musical entertainment.

*The Butterfly Lovers* was a particularly important production for the company. Not only was it a new work with a deeply moving storyline exploring identity and social oppression, this was our first international collaboration. Partnering with Singapore's Wild Rice theatre company, with music by our own Richard Mills, libretto by playwright Joel Tan and direction by Ivan Heng, the production demonstrated the very embodiment of Victorian Opera's mission – to create new works, be culturally diverse and internationally recognised. This was a celebration of love, respect and cooperation in so many ways.

I would also like to acknowledge Victorian Opera's growing Education Program. Essential to our long-term sustainability, the *Access All Areas: Livestream Program* introduces opera to the next generation in an immersive and hands-on way. We presented *The Selfish Giant* to the delight of students across metropolitan and regional Victoria, who enjoyed either a live in-theatre experience, a livestream-into-cinema or stream-into-schools performance. We also offered audience members who may have vision, hearing or sensitivity to sensory variance requirements, access to a relaxed performance. We strive

to provide an accessible opportunity to experience the magic of opera to as many people as possible.

On behalf of Victorian Opera's Board, I express our deep gratitude to the Australia Council for the Arts, The State Government of Victoria through Creative Victoria, and our long-standing foundation partner the Robert Salzer Foundation for its ongoing support.

Without the generous support of the trusts and foundations, patrons, corporate partners and audience members who generously support Victorian Opera, we could not continue to deliver exceptional musical experiences, nor career opportunities for the many talented artists in Victoria and across Australia.

I must pay tribute to our indefatigable Chief Executive Officer Elizabeth Hill-Cooper for her successful and inspiring stewardship, and to Maestro Richard Mills for his immense contributions to our company, to the artform and audiences across Australia this year.

Finally, I would like to particularly acknowledge and thank my fellow board members who gave support, guidance and expertise to our core staff at Victorian Opera. In 2022, Victorian Opera delivered a dynamic and varied season of the highest musical quality. We look forward to continuing to build on that achievement, as we strive to share the love of opera and music theatre with Victorians.

**Genevieve Overell AM**  
Chair, Victorian Opera

## OUR BOARD

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Genevieve Overell AM

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**2022 Board Observers**  
Laiza Garcia  
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## WELCOME

Victorian Opera commenced in 2022 with the long awaited *The Who's Tommy* at the Palais Theatre, St Kilda. Coming back to the studio, we were timid at first with Covid-safe protocols firmly in place and our staff, performers and patrons at the forefront of our thinking. With great optimism, and riding on the energy of this incredibly resourceful cast, crew and creatives, we finally presented this contemporary rock opera. The themes of this work are still relevant in our contemporary world and helped us to engage with patrons who have as yet not sampled our productions.

The next work we staged was Kurt Weill's *Happy End* in March at Arts Centre Melbourne's Playhouse Theatre. This rarely staged gem, directed by Matthew Lutton and featuring some of Australia's most talented musical theatre performers, was again attended by patrons who attend regularly and those who are yet to test the water with Victorian Opera. This musical comedy with anti-capitalist themes seemed to lighten everyone's mood, and audiences left the theatre feeling uplifted and inspired.

*The Selfish Giant*, our Education and Family production, first commissioned in 2019 and seeing its second presentation in 2022, is a work with a wonderful message for the young and young at heart. It was composed and written by Simon Bruckard and Emma Muir Smith, both of whom worked with Victorian Opera as Masters of Opera students in 2015 and 2016. This work is not only a wonderful message but also a result of the tireless years Victorian Opera has worked to provide for talented artists, technicians and creatives the opportunity to hone their skills. We take great pride in creating pathways for all to experience and engage in our industry.

*Il Mago di Oz* reimaged the famous Wizard of Oz and Dorothy's journey along the yellow brick road. The first work under our VO Emerges brand, we were thrilled with the calibre of performances from this cast, crew and creative team. Not surprisingly, this beautifully orchestrated opera attracted both young and old. Featuring a cast of emerging Australian artists with a specially trained children's chorus, the successful staging of this Australian premiere was not only a joy to present, but we celebrated the achievements of the entire cast and their developing aptitude and confidence in performing before a live audience.

The much anticipated *Elektra*, one of Strauss's most vocally and musically challenging works, was a triumph. Under the baton of our Artistic Director Richard Mills, featuring one of the world's greatest soprano's Catherine Foster in the title role, and supported by a stellar Australian cast with Orchestra Victoria performing side by side with ANAM Orchestra, this was a night to remember. When you present a one-night-only spectacular, there are so many contingencies that need to be considered to

safeguard the production during such challenging times. Needless to say, we remained steadfast throughout and the packed Hamer Hall audience very much appreciated and enjoyed the performance, with rapturous applause at the conclusion.

*The Butterfly Lovers*, our first collaboration with international theatre company Wild Rice, brought together two creative organisations specialising in very different theatre-making. All involved learned so much from each other, and the visually beautiful design, the extraordinary singing and sublime music was one of the year's highlights. It was indeed a true meeting of cultures.

As we moved into the final weeks of the 2022 Season, we travelled to Launceston to perform our semi-staged production of *La Cenerentola*. Joined on stage by our performance partner, the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, it was a delightful evening with great singing and wonderful music. We love bringing opera to Tasmania and the audience is always very welcoming and appreciative of our presence there.

We completed our season with the yet another new Australian commission, *A Christmas Carol*. The team of Graham Koehne and Anna Goldworthy injected Dickens' tale with all things Christmas in Melbourne. It was a delightful way to conclude the year, and we are very proud of our commitment to commissioning and presenting new Australian works every year.

Complementing our mainstage program, we also presented a number of smaller concerts and special events throughout the year. Highlights included our Montsalvat project for young singers, the Ballarat Opera Prize and the VOYCE presentation of *Orpheus of the Underworld*.

At Victorian Opera, we often say that 'it takes a village', and I am so grateful to our staff, board, patrons and our philanthropic and government supporters. Without your incredible support of the work we do and the commitment we make to this art form, we could not continue.

Elizabeth Hill-Cooper  
CEO, Victorian Opera

## 2022 ARTIST ENGAGEMENT

229 singing artists received  
516 hours of coaching across  
67 private rehearsals

## NEW AUSTRALIAN OPERA IN DEVELOPMENT

*The Butterfly Lovers*  
Collaboration with Wild Rice,  
Singapore. World premiere on  
Saturday 15 October at Arts  
Centre Melbourne, Playhouse.  
11 artists involved

## DIGITAL ACCESS

808 online attendees across  
4 performances between *Voss*,  
*The Selfish Giant*, *Elektra* and  
*A Christmas Carol*.



# 2022 OVERVIEW: PERFORMANCE

## THE WHO'S TOMMY

23 - 28 February, 2022

Palais Theatre, St Kilda

Total Audience  
**7,631**

"Although Victorian Opera frequently explores beyond the operatic canon, *The Who's Tommy* may be its boldest step beyond the likes of Verdi and Mozart yet"

– ★★★★★, *Limelight*

"Demonstrating enormous flexibility and skilful production qualities once again, Victorian Opera belongs to and embraces everyone."

– *Australian Arts Review*

"Mat Verevis is magnificent as Tommy, his rock inflections effortless and his pure tenor beautifully soulful."

– ★★★, *Timeout*

# INSPIRING AUDIENCES

Victorian Opera reached a national and international audience of

## 41,908

across

## 113

performances, activities and streamed events.

## 2,186

audience members for *The Butterfly Lovers* at Arts Centre Melbourne's Playhouse.

## 7,631

audience members attended *The Who's Tommy*.

## 14,125

Unique views of the Access All Areas: Livestream Program's four workshops and performance, streamed live and on-demand to 3,530 students and 314 teachers.

## 1,535

Attendees at the one night only performance of *Elektra* at Arts Centre Melbourne's Hamer Hall.



### HAPPY END

"The joyfully nostalgic 'Bilbao Song' and heartbreaking 'Surabaya Johnny' in particular have long been cabaret staples. This confident, accomplished Victorian Opera production directed by Matthew Lutton is a rare opportunity to experience those songs in their original context."

– *Limelight*



### A CHRISTMAS CAROL

"Victorian Opera's updated Melburnian take on Dickens' classic morality tale brings a new perspective to the social problems of our time."

– *Arts Hub*

### LA CENERENTOLA

"Margarita Gritskova ... was an unmitigated delight from her first full-throated note."

– *Backtrack*



# PRODUCTIONS IN 2022

### IL MAGO DI OZ

"*Il Mago di Oz* deftly navigates a difficult line – balancing giving people what they expect from such a beloved and familiar story while also delivering a new and fresh interpretation."

– *The Age*



### THE BUTTERFLY LOVERS

"In this collaborative re-imagining of *The Butterfly Lovers*, what began with a meeting of creative minds in 2015 can now be chalked up as one of Victorian Opera's most significant achievements."

– *Classic Melbourne*

### THE SELFISH GIANT

"An attractive and relevant addition to the repertoire"

– *Australian Book Reviews*



### ELEKTRA

"Catherine Foster makes a stunning Australian debut in a concert of Strauss' Greek tragedy."

– *Limelight*



Photography and Illustration Credits:  
 Sarah Jackson (Cover), Charlie Kinross (p. 1, 3, 6, 7), Bri Hammond (p. 8), Jeff Busby (p. 4-5, 6-7, 10-11, 14), Mel Serjeant (p. 8)



## EDUCATION

The education programs offered by Victorian Opera received significant uptake in 2022 through successful outreach efforts as the state opened up and adapted to relaxed Covid settings.

The return of *The Selfish Giant* written by Emma Muir-Smith and composed by Simon Bruckard, was a key success. This production is a charming adaptation of Oscar Wilde's charming short story that has been enchanting young readers since it was first published in 1888, and an added feature is that the creators are former Victorian Opera Developing Artists.

Arts Centre Melbourne saw 2862 students and teachers from 31 schools attend live in-theatre performances of *The Selfish Giant*, which was up 633 from 2019 figures and 486 students attended the relaxed performance. The *Access All Areas: Livestream Program* complemented this Education Opera by providing four workshops available to schools in the lead-up to the performance season. In these workshops students explore the story, the process of designing the world of the story, the different voice types and how to direct a scene, as well as learn a song from the opera so that they can sing along when watching a performance. A total 55 schools from across the State took

part in this program, which was further complemented by 347 students from 8 schools viewing the performance in cinemas from the regional centres of Ballarat, Bendigo and Sale.

We thank the Victorian Department of Education who provide funding through the Strategic Partnerships Program, as well as the Marian & E.H. Flack Trust and the William Angliss Charitable Fund, whose generosity assists in the delivery of the relaxed performance and digital outreach to regional cinemas.

The Winter Youth Opera Program at Monsalvat was adapted in 2022 to allow participants the opportunity to rehearse and present chorus repertoire during the mid-year school holidays. This program was interrupted due to Covid, but resumed under the careful direction of Richard Mills and Head of Music Phoebe Briggs, the result being 19 participants being able to perform to appreciative audiences.

The Victorian Opera Youth Chorus Ensemble (VOYCE) merged with the Youth Opera Program to produce *Offenbach's Orpheus in the Underworld* at Carlton's Church of all Nations. This production was well received and highlighted the depth of talent apparent in this ensemble. Meeting weekly during school terms, VOYCE started the year with 46

participants who auditioned to gain their place; they were ably supported by Director of VOYCE Angus Grant and Head of Music Phoebe Briggs. The year was successfully rounded off by Horti Hall being the venue for the annual Showcase across two concerts, with Douglass Kelly featuring as a soloist.

2022 saw new directions for the Education Department with Education Manager Ioanna Salmanidis departing to pursue studies as a classical pianist. We thank Ioanna for her dedicated service to the company and building meaningful programs for students across the state. We also thank Emma Wenlock-Bolt, our Education Administrator, who maintained the positive outreach and daily functions of the department during the handover process.

As Victoria adapted to a more relaxed approach to Covid, Victorian Opera was there to provide engaging learning and performance experiences for students across the state. The strong uptake in programs and positive feedback from teachers and students alike cements Victorian Opera as a key provider in educational experiences.

**Tim Ryan**  
 Education Manager, Victorian Opera

# PATRONS

## Patron-In-Chief

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## Founding Benefactors

The late Dame Elisabeth Murdoch AC  
Lady Potter AC

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Secret Admirers (6)

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Elspeth & the late Harold Riggall  
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Thomas Sykes  
Raymond Wilkinson  
In memory of Helen Robertson  
Secret Admirers (13)

## Bequestors

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Lesley Bawden  
Danielle & the late Frank Chamberlin  
Len de Kievit and the late Graeme Bawden  
Jane Kunstler  
Richard Laslett & Colin Gunther  
Gregory J Reinhardt AM  
Lorraine Weiner & Geoffrey Blick  
Tony Wildman & Robert Gibbs  
Secret Admirers (6)

If you are interested in becoming a Victorian Opera Patron, or having a gift to Victorian Opera in your Will, please contact Louise O'Loughlin, Development Manager on (03) 9001 6405 or email [louise@victorianopera.com.au](mailto:louise@victorianopera.com.au)

*Current at time of printing.*

Once again, our patrons demonstrated their commitment to Victorian Opera by maintaining and increasing their annual gifts during 2022, despite the residual challenges as we emerged from the pandemic.

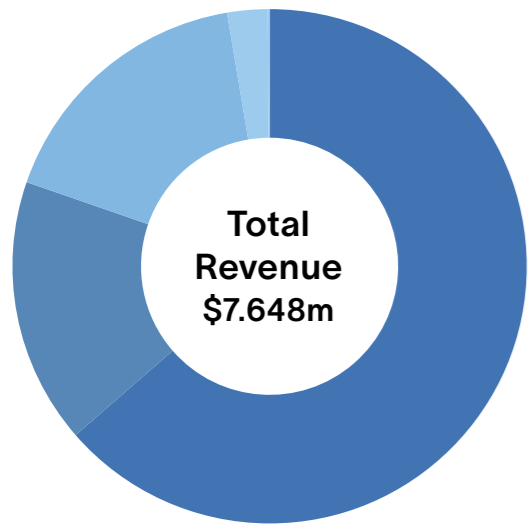
The encouragement and trust exhibited by this extraordinary group of individuals was nothing short of exceptional and a great demonstration of their respect for the work we do and commitment to our long-term vision.

For this, we remain eternally grateful and extend our heartfelt thanks to these loyal patrons.

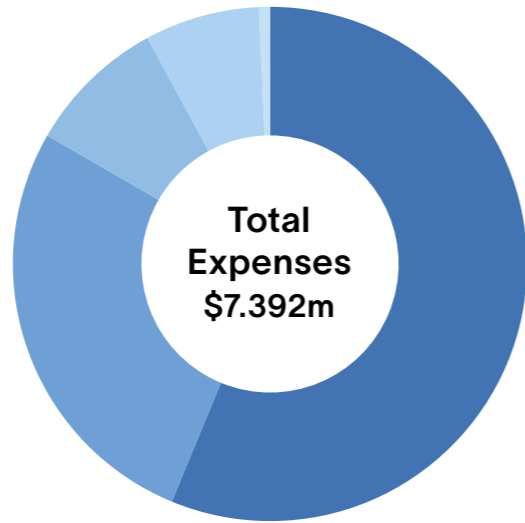
**Louise O'Loughlin**  
Head of Development,  
Victorian Opera

# FINANCIALS

2022

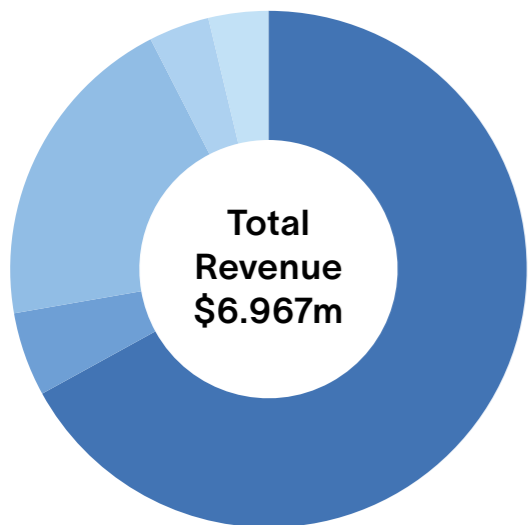


- Government funding 64%
- Box office and performance 17%
- Sponsorship, philanthropy and donation 17%
- Lease and other income 2%
- Bequests income 4%

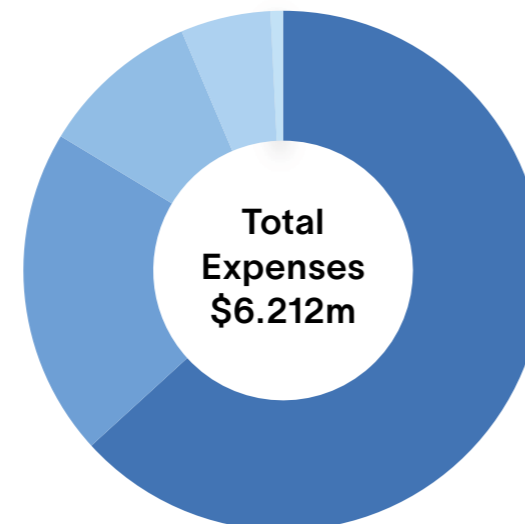


- Personnel (including artists and production staff) 56%
- Production 27%
- Administrative 9%
- Marketing and Development 7%
- Lease finance costs 1%
- Bequests income 4%

2021



- Government funding 67%
- Box office and performance 5%
- Sponsorship, philanthropy and donation 20%
- Lease and other income 4%
- Bequests income 4%



- Personnel (including artists and production staff) 63%
- Production 20%
- Administrative 10%
- Marketing and Development 6%
- Lease finance costs 1%
- Bequests income 4%

# OUR PARTNERS

We acknowledge and thank our partners who make our work possible

## Government Partners

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Victorian Opera is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

Victorian Opera is supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.

Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) Fund – an Australian Government initiative

## Foundation Partner



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# VICTORIAN OPERA

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