



VICTORIAN  
OPERA

COMPOSED BY JONATHAN MILLS | LIBRETTO BY MEREDITH OAKES | DIRECTED BY MICHAEL GOW

# EUCALYPTUS

THE OPERA

Victorian Opera respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the unceded land on which we work and live: the people of the Eastern Kulin Nation. We acknowledge these original owners and custodians of the lands and waterways and their enduring cultural practices of caring for Country.

We pay respect to their Elders past and present.

VICTORIAN OPERA AND OPERA AUSTRALIA PRESENT

# EUCALYPTUS: THE OPERA

Based on Murray Bail's novel, *Eucalyptus*

Presented in association with Victorian Opera, Brisbane Festival  
and Opera Australia with West Australian Opera

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## CREATIVES

Composer **Jonathan Mills**

Librettist **Meredith Oakes**

Conductor **Tahu Matheson**<sup>^</sup>

Director **Michael Gow**

Set and Costume Designer **Simone Romaniuk**

Lighting Designer **Trudy Dalgleish**

Cover Conductor **Richard Mills**

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## CAST

Ellen **Desiree Frahn**

Holland **Simon Meadows**

The Stranger **Michael Petruccelli**

Mr Cave **Samuel Dundas**

Sprunt Sister **Natalie Jones**

Sprunt Sister **Dimity Shepherd**

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## CHORUS

Paul Batey  
Paul Biencourt  
Kirilie Blythman  
Rebecca Crabtree

Alastair Cooper-Golec  
Nicholas Cowall  
Irving Dekterev  
Shania Eliassen

Olivia Federow-Yemm  
Eamon Dooley  
Shakira Dugan  
Jerzy Kozlowski

Kiran Rajasingam  
Rebecca Rashleigh  
Juel Riggall  
Diana Simpson

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## WEST AUSTRALIAN OPERA (WAO) CHORUS

Vocal Soundscape recorded by WAO Chorus

Jessica Blunt  
Ruth Burke  
Belinda Butler  
Ry Charleson  
Ben Del Borrello  
Kohsei Gilkes

Perry Joyce  
Lachlann Lawton  
Audrey Lombardi  
Lucy Mervik  
Brett Peart  
David Penco

Courtney Pitman  
Prudence Sanders  
Keaton Staszewski-Hose  
Stephanie Thyer

Supported by Philip Bacon, AO & Carol Colburn Grigor, CBE

<sup>^</sup>*The appearance of Tahu Matheson is proudly supported by Lyn Williams AM*

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## ORCHESTRA

Orchestra Victoria

**16 - 19 OCTOBER**

**PALAIS THEATRE, ST KILDA**

2 hours and 20 minutes, including one interval

Sung in English

Commissioned by Opera Australia and Victorian Opera

Co-production by Victorian Opera, Opera Australia, Perth Festival and Brisbane Festival



## CEO'S MESSAGE

Welcome to Melbourne's performance of *Eucalyptus: The Opera*. This work has been many years in development and, along with our producing partners of Opera Australia, Perth Festival and Brisbane Festival, we are very proud to present it at the iconic Palais Theatre.

Seen earlier this year in Perth and Brisbane, *Eucalyptus* swept audiences away with the story of Ellen, daughter of Holland. I've found working with Jonathan Mills and the creative team, led by Michael Gow and Tahu Matheson, to be inspiring, and I hope that attending this intriguing and thought-provoking work will leave you inspired, too.

Creating new Australian work is at the pinnacle of Victorian Opera's mission, and this opera couldn't be more Australian. Thank you, Murray Bail, for allowing your tale to be told in an operatic form. The score reflects the outback, taking inspiration from the sights, sounds and scents of Australian forests. This, alongside such beautifully constructed text, makes for a compelling experience.

We acknowledge our funding partners: Creative Australia, The State Government of Victoria through Creative Victoria, the Robert Salzer Foundation, and all the individual patrons, trusts and foundations who recognise the importance of new Australian work.

It's been a wonderful experience working with the teams across Perth festival, led by Iain Grandage, Brisbane Festival led by Louise Bezzina and Opera Australia led by Fiona Allen. The project received specific funds for its production from Philip Bacon, AO and Carol Colburn Grigor, CBE, thank you for your generous support of this incredible Australian work.

Thank you for joining Victorian Opera for this performance. Your ongoing patronage of our company is greatly appreciated.

Enjoy!

**ELIZABETH HILL-COOPER**  
CEO, Victorian Opera



## ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Post pandemic, there has been a seismic shift in the leadership of opera companies in Australia. I'm pleased to say this has ushered in an exciting new era of collaboration. We all know our sector is too fragile to be operating in a bubble – funding has remained largely static, costs of goods and services continue to skyrocket, let alone navigating and predicting the changes in audience attendance. All these factors make it a no-brainer that we must work together to build the sector again.

Australia's opera companies are very different, servicing, as they do, very different capital cities. But Opera Australia and Victorian Opera share performance responsibilities in one of Australia's great cities: Melbourne.

As companies, we're 'same, same but different'. So, we proudly present a Victorian Opera/Opera Australia co-commission: Jonathan Mills' haunting retelling of Murray Bail's classic novel, *Eucalyptus*.

Co-produced with Perth Festival, Brisbane Festival and Opera Australia, this modern Australian fairytale is brought to life with a

stellar Australian cast drawn from across the land: Desiree Frahn, Simon Meadows, Sam Dundas, Michael Petrucelli, Dimity Shepherd and Natalie Jones. They join a formidable creative team led by director Michael Gow, designer Simone Romaniuk and lighting designer Trudy Dalglish, all under the baton of conductor Tahu Matheson. The score is mysterious and colourful, with many moments of dramatic intensity and hushed beauty and wonder. These are the unique, mystical sounds of the Australian bush.

*Eucalyptus* is new Australian opera at its most compelling. It is a moving and fascinating examination of our recent time and place.

**STUART MAUNDER**  
Artistic Director, Victorian Opera



## COMPOSER'S MESSAGE

I was drawn to Murray Bail's novel *Eucalyptus* as the subject for an opera for several reasons. It is timeless. It invites us into the solitary world and vivid imagination of Ellen, the daughter of a widower renowned for her "speckled beauty". Ellen and her father Holland live an isolated life, surrounded by an encyclopaedic forest of eucalyptus trees.

Holland is as possessive of his daughter as he is obsessive about his extensive collection of eucalypts.

To a composer in search of a story, *Eucalyptus* has more than a passing resemblance to Giacomo Puccini's opera *Turandot* or the story of *Scheherazade*. An unknown Prince Calaf must solve riddles in *Turandot*. In *Scheherazade*, an elusive woman deliberately never quite finishes telling tales each night before dawn, to stay alive for just one more night – as it turns out, for 1,001 nights.

In place of riddles and stories with no endings, Murray Bail's poetic novel has the tree inspector Mr Cave and the Stranger. They offer a dynamic contrast between fact and fable; between the names of trees; and the convoluted tales, and eccentric ways by which a tree is named.

Mr Cave's relentless, almost maniacal focus is juxtaposed with the Stranger's extravagant, discursive rambles. Mr Cave inhabits a taxonomical world of lists of Latin names. The Stranger conjures fantastic tales about trees in all sorts of surprising places, from deserted cities to fecund deserts.

Translating *Eucalyptus* from page to stage brings

great possibilities for composing for a chorus. What role could the chorus play in an operatic interpretation of such a subtle and elusive novel? I want to explore a musical evocation of a chorus – on and off stage – singing the botanical names of all the different eucalyptus species; not to impress or confuse, to burden or bore, rather as the inspiration for the trees themselves. The trees' unique hues and tones, textures and scents, become characters, or at least elements in an unfolding drama.

*Eucalyptus* is a drama in which the idea, the symbolism, the mystery and the wildness of a forest becomes woven deeply into the storyline of the opera. There is a rich tradition of operas set in forests, from *Die Freischütz* to *Don Carlos*, *Norma* to *Hansel and Gretel*, *Pelléas et Mélisande* to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Through *Eucalyptus: The Opera*, I want to trace how a world of 'landscape and memory' (to borrow from historian Simon Schama) might find musical expression and dramatic form in the unique physical and psychological contours of Australia.

Thinking about how landscape and memory might intertwine through time and space, both unfolding on stage, is essential to the process of writing an opera like *Eucalyptus*. Our digital age is binary and blatant. It is not a time conducive to myths or fantasies, fables or fairy tales (even when such fantasies are far preferable to relative truths). We tend to measure rather than embody, condense rather than elaborate.

At the core of *Eucalyptus* is a rite of passage; an act repeated countless times and in myriad

places, searching not so much for meaning as manifestation, charisma, spirit, aura... air.

Spanish poet Federico García Lorca describes it best as: "a wind with the odour of a child's saliva, crushed grass, and Medusa's veil, announcing the endless baptism of freshly created things."<sup>[1]</sup>

It has been a pleasure to see our opera grow and take shape through the passion and poetry of Meredith Oakes' libretto.

I would like to record my gratitude to Fiona Allan, John Berry, Louise Bezzina, Sarah Billingham, Robert Blocker, Lee Buddle, Adrian Collette, Jo Davies, (the late) Richard Gill, Iain Grandage, (the late) Richard Hickox, Elizabeth Hill-Cooper, Anthony Hunt, Tony Legge, Stuart Maunder, Cyrus Meurant, Richard Mills, (the late) Barbara Mobbs, Alex Reedijk, Stuart Stratford, Lyndon Terracini, Ruth Thomas, Elliot Wheeler and Doris Yarick-Cross for their support and encouragement of *Eucalyptus: The Opera*.

I would like to acknowledge the generosity of Philip Bacon and Carol Colburn Grigor for this production. *Eucalyptus* is dedicated, with love and admiration, to Ben Dival.

## JONATHAN MILLS

Composer, *Eucalyptus*

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<sup>[1]</sup> From Play and Theory of *The Duende* (1933) translated by A S Kline (2007)

*Eucalyptus: The Opera* was commissioned by Richard Hickox for Opera Australia in 2006. Its composition was delayed due to my appointment as Festival Director in Edinburgh the same year. Work began in earnest in 2014. *Eucalyptus* is my third opera. COVID-19 interrupted the plans for its première in Sydney in 2020.

The première season of *Eucalyptus* in Perth with West Australian Symphony Orchestra, and WA Opera in February 2024; in Brisbane with Queensland Symphony Orchestra and Opera Queensland Chorus in September 2024; and in Melbourne with Orchestra Victoria and Victorian Opera Chorus, in October 2024, is a collaboration between Victorian Opera and Opera Australia, with Perth and Brisbane Festivals.

*Eucalyptus* is presented in concert in Perth, and in a production directed by Michael Gow and designed by Simone Romaniuk in Brisbane and Melbourne.

The score has been copied and edited with great skill and dedication by Peggy Polias. The musical preparation of the soloists and chorus has been expertly led by Phoebe Briggs, Carlos del Cueto and Hugh Lydon.

The composition and libretto of *Eucalyptus* have greatly benefitted from workshops held in Glasgow, New Haven, New York, Melbourne and Sydney, with thanks to the young artists of Opera Australia, Scottish Opera and Yale Opera.



Brisbane Season of *Eucalyptus*, 2024

Photo: Billie Wilson Coffey



## DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

How do you stage an opera that has locations including a railway station, a riverbank, a forest of eucalypts, a sickroom and an entire country town? An opera that is part shaggy-dog story and part national myth?

Answer: as simply as possible.

Early in his novel, *Eucalyptus*, Murray Bail writes: "Once upon a time there was a man – what's wrong with that?" A little later we read: "To this day it's still talked about, its effects still felt in the town and surrounding districts."

These sentences gave us a place to start with ideas for staging *Eucalyptus* as an opera. Designer Simone Romaniuk and I decided to make that operatic essential, the chorus, our contemporaries. It is as if a group of townspeople have gathered to tell you this story, which may or may not have been embellished and embroidered over time, like all folk tales.

In his novel, Murray Bail offers us another reference point. He describes a character as having eyes "like Lawrence of Arabia in the film". David Lean's epic film came out in 1962. It

reached Australia a year or so later. So, we've set the characters on stage to be in the early 1960s, their clothes faded and dusty with heat and time.

The townspeople of *Eucalyptus* have set up a screen showing vintage images from the town's history. They've even organised an orchestra that fills the stage of a shire hall somewhere to tell us, the audience, about Holland's beautiful daughter, Ellen.

But it's not long before the chorus abandons their simple storytelling and becomes involved in the performance. And even though there are standard operatic elements – a love triangle, a storm, a mad scene – Ellen rethinks the standard operatic ending.

*Eucalyptus: The Opera* shows that stories can change with changing attitudes and beliefs. That's what we want to present in this production.

**MICHAEL GOW**  
Director, *Eucalyptus*





Brisbane Season of Eucalyptus, 2024  
Photo: Billie Wilson Coffey



## CONDUCTOR'S MESSAGE

In chapter 23 of the eponymous novel, the narrator informs us that "Eucalypts are notorious for giving off an inhospitable, unsympathetic air".

I think that's a little unfair to the great Australian native – I have never found a gum tree to be anything other than charming, delightful, witty and liltingly musical. Perhaps their obvious laid-back, cool and unconcerned air could be misconstrued as aloofness?

Their chief attribute, I would hazard, apart from their untroubled rhythmic undulation, is, undoubtedly, diversity. Diversity here represents an astounding dissemination of difference. The trees have evolved and adapted to deal with a multiplicity of environments and situations so dissimilar that it has produced species, from diminutive bush to towering giant, in numbers exceeding 700. They are completely, unrecognisably different, seemingly utterly unrelated, and vastly unequal in stature. Yet neither supercilious vanity nor bellicose jealousy interfere with their serene harmonious calm.

Is there a lesson to be learned from the magnificent genus?

A human of physical or mental traits often becomes the object of some sort of idealised aspiration; the attaining or conquest of which is the quintessence of myth. The rigorous task in this narrative to name the innumerable different eucalyptus on the property has been set by Holland, the overprotective father (and somewhat like the unreasonable competition in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* or the riddles in *Turandot*).

The task seems comfortably unachievable, and Ellen, the ideal, unattainable. But like all snug complacency, satisfied comfort is up-ended by hard-edged rigour. Can troublesome human fallibilities be superseded by botanical harmony? Harmony? Why that's a musical idea, a task for a composer!

How to realise a tree in sound; how to evoke the rustle, the crackle, the susurrant of the forest; how to make clear the effulgent streams of sunlight through the trees; the rain commingling with branches to create new colours, hues, shades and textures?

How to illustrate the mysterious Stranger's curious free-flowing stories; Ellen's thirsting eagerness for them; Holland's bumbling, well-meaning, misguided fatherly love; Cave's awkward but ineluctable aptitude; and all surrounded in verdant harmony?

It is no mean task.

Jonathan Mills has used every ingredient of orchestral texture, nuance and variance to evoke the forest of trees and feelings in a score that ranges from the simple to the extraordinarily complex, from the obviously imitative to the expressively emotive.

The duty of the conductor is to encourage a range of expression that moves from the strepitous snarl of the storm to the collected calm of the post-tempest haze; from snapping stoccado squalls of the vigilant father to the stolid stillness of distant unresolvable pain; from idyllic natural joy to outraged teenage angst.

The list, rather like the names of the trees, is gargantuan. Add to this the subtle gradations of human thought, behaviour and emotion, and the conclusion is quickly reached that the perfect interpretation, like the faerie-tale prize in the competition, is, and must be, unachievable.

But attempting the unattainable is rewarding and illuminating.

In the story, it becomes clear Ellen cannot be won in a competition. Trapped by the unstoppable advance of the competition, Ellen transmogrifies into the mythic prize the competitors see her as and begins to fade. Out of necessity, and only through great effort of self-overcoming, Ellen divests herself of mythic status and becomes real: complicated, fluid, undefinable, infinite and alive.

The composer must let go of the ideal and the work begins to come alive in all its contrasting complexity. The conductor never succeeds entirely in their vision, but the work begins to breathe.

The competition cannot be won, but Ellen will succeed.

**TAHU MATHESON**  
Conductor, *Eucalyptus*



*Brisbane Season of Eucalyptus, 2024*  
Photo: Billie Wilson Coffey

# PRODUCTION

## PRODUCTION TEAM

Stage Manager  
**Lucie Sutherland**

Assistant Stage  
Manager  
**Tiah Bullock**

Costume Manager  
**Mel Serjeant**

Wardrobe Supervisor  
**Becky Silveira**

Head of Wigs and  
Make up  
**Deb Müller**

Surtitles Operator  
**Finlay Pedler**

Head Electrician  
**Jamie Turner**

Lighting Technician  
**Jack Willis-Hall**

Lighting Programmer  
**Peter Darby**

Dome Operators  
**Sam Victoria**  
**Nathan Mckeogh**

FOH Audio Engineer  
**Daniel O'Callaghan**

Live Stream Director  
**Alex Hasker**

Live Stream Sound  
**Sam Moxham**

Score Reader  
**Adele Conlin**

## MUSIC STAFF

Head of Music  
**Phoebe Briggs**

Repetiteur  
**Tom Griffiths**  
**Phillipa Safey**

Chorus Master  
**Carlos del Cueto**

## SEASON STAFF

Costume Maintenance

**Nicole Serjeant**

Hair and Makeup

**Kat Payen-Payne**

Dressers

**Olivia Peters**

**Xander Riechard**

Costumiers

**Elizabeth Gooden**

**Fiona Holley**

**Olivia Peters**

**Xander Riechard**

**Nicole Serjeant**

**Becky Silveira**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Monitor City

Imported Theatre  
Fabrics

LexAV

## ORCHESTRA

### ORCHESTRA VICTORIA

Violin

Concertmaster

**Sulki Yu**

*Chair supported by Lady  
Southey AC*

Deputy Concertmaster

**Yi Wang**

*Chair supported by Susan &  
Leith Campbell*

Section Principal First Violin

**Tony Zhai<sup>§</sup>**

Section Principal Second

Violin

**Monica Naselow**

*Chair supported by Peter  
Griffin AM & Terry Swann*

Associate Principal First  
Violin

**Tomomi Brennan**

Associate Principal First  
Violin

**Erica Kennedy**

Acting Associate Principal  
Second Violin

**Rebecca Shirley**

*Chair supported by Mr  
Andrew Fairley AM*

Tutti

**Binny Baik**

*Chair supported by  
The Fielding Foundation*

**Alyssa Conrau**

*Chair supported by Leanne  
Menegazzo*

**Rachel Gamer**

**Matt Hassall**

*Chair supported by  
Mr Russell & Dr Jenni Jenkins*

**Rachael Hunt**

*Chair supported by The  
Fielding Foundation*

**Philip Nixon**

**John Noble**

**Lucy Warren**

**Josef Hanna<sup>+</sup>**

**Edwina Kayser<sup>+</sup>**

**Lynette Rayner<sup>+</sup>**

**Ben Spiers<sup>+</sup>**

Viola

Section Principal

**Paul McMillan**

*Chair supported by Ms Linda  
Herd*

Associate Principal

**Thomas Higham<sup>§</sup>**

Acting Associate Principal

**Matt Laing<sup>+</sup>**

Tutti

**Jason Bunn**

**Nadine Delbridge**

*Chair supported by Kangaroo  
Ground Nominees Pty Ltd.*

**Simon Collins<sup>+</sup>**

**Phoebe Green<sup>+</sup>**

**Haram Kim<sup>+</sup>**

Cello  
Section Principal  
**Melissa Chominsky**  
Associate Principal  
**Diane Froomes**  
Tutti  
**Sarah Cuming**  
*Chair supported by Angela Kayser*  
**Philippa Gardner**  
**Tania Hardy-Smith**

Double Bass  
Section Principal  
**Stuart Riley** §  
*Chair supported by Don & Angela Mercer*  
Acting Section Principal  
**Kylie Davies**  
Acting Associate Principal  
**Matthew Thorne**  
Tutti  
**Che Booth+**  
**Sam Nock+**

Flute  
Section Principal  
**Lisa-Maree Amos**  
*Chair supported by Peter Griffin AM & Terry Swann*  
Associate Principal  
**Jessie Gu** §  
**Melissa Doecke+**  
Principal Piccolo/Tutti Flute  
**Lauren Gorman+**  
**Rebecca Johnson+**

Oboe  
Acting Section Principal  
**Joshua de Graaf**  
Associate Principal  
**Jasper Ly+**  
Principal Cor Anglais/Tutti  
Oboe  
**Dafydd Camp**  
*Chair supported by Ms Linda Herd*

Clarinet  
Section Principal  
**Paul Champion**  
Associate Principal  
**Justin Beere**  
Principal Bass Clarinet/Tutti  
Clarinet  
**Robin Henry+**  
**Aaron Klein+**

Bassoon  
Section Principal  
**Hugh Ponnuthurai** §  
Associate Principal  
**Colin Forbes-Abrams+**  
**Chris Martin+**  
Tutti  
**Jack Cremer+**

Horn  
Section Principal  
**Andrew Young**  
Associate Principal  
**Benjamin Messenger+**  
Principal Third Horn  
**Linda Hewett**  
Tutti  
**Sharon Hatton+**

Trumpet  
Section Principal  
**Mark Fitzpatrick**  
Associate Principal  
**Timothy Francis**  
Tutti  
**Sophie Spencer+**

Trombone  
Section Principal  
**Scott Evans** §  
Acting Section Principal  
**Kieran Conrau**  
Associate Principal  
**Iain Faragher+**  
Principal Bass Trombone  
**Benjamin Anderson**  
Principal Bass Trombone/  
Tutti Trombone  
**Robert Collins+**

Timpani  
Section Principal  
**Guy du Blêt**  
*Chair supported by Mr Jim Cousins AO & Mrs Libby Cousins AM with Igor Zambelli*  
Associate Principal Timpani/  
Tutti Percussion  
**Scott Weathersen+**

Percussion  
Section Principal  
**Mathew Levy**  
*Associate Principal*  
**Matthew Brennan+**  
Tutti  
**Robert Allan+**  
**Adam Cooper-**  
**Stanbury+**

Harp  
Section Principal  
**Julie Raines+**  
Associate Principal  
**Jessica Fontinos+**

KEY  
+ Denotes guest musician  
§ Denotes on leave

For a complete listing  
of Orchestra Victoria's  
musicians and staff, visit:  
[orchestravictoria.com.au](http://orchestravictoria.com.au)



## SYNOPSIS

Holland, a widower, lives with his daughter on a property in the country where he has planted every kind of eucalypt he can lay his hands on.

His daughter has become a young woman, and her beauty attracts attention wherever they go. But Ellen has no interest in romance. Holland, anxious to find the right man for his daughter, announces a competition: the man who can correctly name, on the spot, all the species of eucalypts on Holland's land will become Ellen's husband.

Ellen is horrified and, to the amazement of the locals, contestants come from far and wide. But they all fall short before the test is completed. A likely winner eventually emerges – a middle-aged tree expert called Mr Cave.

Ellen, wandering alone in the forest where she feels safe, discovers a man sleeping under a tree. This Stranger is about to identify the tree, but instead begins to tell Ellen stories inspired by trees that remain nameless.

Ellen is fascinated and shocked by the Stranger's tales. She becomes obsessed with the stories and attracted to their teller. She discovers a deeper meaning in the stories, and finds the freedom and courage to make her own decisions about her life.

The story moves between the house and forest on Holland's property, and locations in the nearby small town. The townspeople, including the ever-watchful Sprunt sisters, comment freely on events. Trees and the river play their part as well.





# CREATIVE TEAM

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## MURRAY BAIL

Writer – *Eucalyptus*, 1998 novel

Murray Bail was born in Adelaide, 1941. His novel *Eucalyptus* won the Miles Franklin Award and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize. His other novels include *Homesickness*, *The Pages* and *The Voyage*, and in 2021, *He*, a memoir.

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## JONATHAN MILLS

Composer

Jonathan Mills is a prominent Australian-born, composer and festival director, who resides in the UK. In the 1990s he worked in the Architecture Faculty of RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia, leading courses in acoustic design. He is the composer of several award-winning operas and works for chamber ensemble and orchestra. His opera *Eternity Man* was recognised by a Genesis Foundation commission in 2003, and his oratorio *Sandakan Threnody* won the Prix Italia in 2005.

His opera *Eucalyptus*, based on the novel by Murray Bail, was performed in 2024 at the Perth and Brisbane Festivals, and in Melbourne in a co-production by Victorian Opera and Opera Australia.

He has been director of various festivals in the Blue Mountains, Brisbane, Melbourne and Edinburgh, UK, where he was the director of the Edinburgh International Festival between 2007 and 2014. In 2015 he was appointed Artistic Curator of the inaugural Lincoln Center Global Exchange at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, New York.

In 2012 he founded and was inaugural Director (until 2022) of the Edinburgh International Culture Summit, a UNESCO-recognised biennial meeting held in conjunction with Edinburgh's summer festivals.

He is currently Vice-Chancellor's Creative Fellow at The University of Melbourne, Creative Adviser to Museums Victoria, Trumbull Fellow and Visiting Professor at Yale University, and a Guest Curator at the University of Oxford, UK.

His work has been recognised by awards from the governments of Australia, Britain, France, Poland and South Korea.



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## MEREDITH OAKES

Librettist

Meredith Oakes is a playwright, librettist and translator. She was born and grew up in Sydney, working as a music critic there (for the *Telegraph*), and later in London, where she wrote for *Music and Musicians*, the *Listener* and the *Independent*. Her plays and her translations of plays have been staged in theatres, including the Royal Court and the National Theatre in London. She has written libretti for composers including Thomas Adès, Gerald Barry, Barry Conyngham and Francisco Coll. *The Tempest*, which she wrote with Thomas Adès, has been performed at Covent Garden, the Vienna Opera and the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

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## MICHAEL GOW

Director

Michael Gow's plays include the Australian classic *Away*, *Toy Symphony*, *The Kid*, *On Top of the World*, *Europe*, *Sweet Phoebe*, *Live Acts on Stage*, *17* (for the Royal National Theatre of Great Britain), *Toy Symphony* and *Once in Royal David's City*. He translated Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* for Belvoir.

Michael has been Associate Director of Sydney Theatre Company and Artistic Director of Queensland Theatre Company. He has directed for all the major Australian theatre companies, as well as Australian Theatre for Young People and the Lincoln Center's New Visions/New Voices program.

For Opera Australia, he has directed *Iphigénie en Tauride*, *The Abduction from the Seraglio* and *The Pearl Fishers*, as well as directing its touring productions of *Don Giovanni*, *The Magic Flute* and *The Marriage of Figaro*, for which he also wrote the English libretti. In 2016 he wrote the English libretto and directed the critically acclaimed *Voyage to the Moon* for Victorian Opera/Musica Viva.

Michael's awards include two NSW Premier's Literary Awards, two Sydney Theatre Critics Circle Awards and an AFI Award for the ABC miniseries *Edens Lost*.

For Queensland Conservatorium, Michael has directed productions of *Hansel and Gretel* in 2014 and *Street Scene* in 2021.



## **TAHU MATHESON**

Conductor

Tahu has worked for Opera Australia since 2007. In 2017, he became Head of Music for the company. He studied piano with Kalle Randalu in Germany, and with Oleg Stepanov and Natasha Vlassenko at the Queensland Conservatorium, where he completed his Master of Music.

For Opera Australia, he has been the conductor for: *Tosca*, *La Traviata*, *Aida*, *Carmen*, *Whiteley*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Turandot*, *La Bohème*, *L'elisir d'amore*, *Lohengrin*, *The Magic Flute*, *The Pearlfishers*, *Aida on the Beach*, *Satyagraha in Concert*, *Carmen on Cockatoo Island*, *Don Giovanni* on tour.

He has also conducted *The Seven Deadly Sins* for Victorian Opera, and *Nelson* by Stuart Greenbaum.



## **SIMONE ROMANIUK**

Set and Costume Designer

Simone Romaniuk is an award-winning live-performance designer for theatre, opera and festivals. Sets and costumes she has designed for opera include *Bohème on the Beach*, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, *Love Burns*, and *Boojum!* for State Opera South Australia.

She has also designed *Rinaldo* (Pinchgut Opera); *Iolanthe* (Queensland Conservatorium); *La Vie Parisienne* (RNCM, Manchester); *La Sonnambula* (Pacific Opera), *Hansel and Gretel* (Opera Queensland); *The Mikado* (NZ Opera, SOSA), *The Merry Widow*, *Space Encounters*, *The Magic Flute*.

Set and costumes she has designed for theatre include Brisbane Festival productions *Bananaland* (with Sydney Festival), *Macbeth* and *The Wizard of Oz*. For Queensland Theatre, she has designed for *Tiny Beautiful Things* (with Belvoir), *The Almighty Sometimes*, *Bernhardt/ Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Elizabeth: Almost by Chance a Woman*, *Venus in Fur*, *Bombshells*, *Kelly* (national tour), *Head Full of Love* (national tour), *Fractions*, *The Little Dog Laughed*, *Australia Day*, *The Pitch*, *The China Incident*, *The Removalists*, *An Oak Tree*, *Man Equals Man*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Eating Ice Cream*, *Beckett x 3*, *Ruby Moon*.

For Ensemble Theatre, she has designed for *Suddenly Last Summer*, *Clyde's*, *Honour*, *Kenny*, *The Last Wife*, *Luna Gale*, *Shirley Valentine*, *Frankenstein* (national tour), *Casanova*. For Sydney Theatre Company: *The Crucible*, *Seneca's Thyestes*. And for Unicorn Theatre, London: *The Hunting Lodge*. Simone was Creative Director of Adelaide Festival Centre's *OzAsia Festival* and *Moon Lantern Parade* from 2015–2019. Prior to that, she has held positions as Festival Designer for Brisbane Festival and Resident Designer with Queensland Theatre. She is a graduate of Queensland College of Art and NIDA.



## TRUDY DALGLEISH

Lighting Designer

One of Australia's most sought-after lighting designers, Trudy Dalglish's awards include a Helpmann Award for *White Devil* (Best Lighting Design, Theatre), an 'Entech' Award for Best Lighting Designer (Live Events), the John Truscott Design Award for Excellence, and Green Room Awards for *Eureka* (Music Theatre Technical Design) and *Hairspray* (Best Lighting).

Trudy has also been nominated for a Helpmann Award for *Dead Man Walking* and Green Room Awards for *Orlando* (Opera Australia), *Boy from Oz* (Production Company) and *The Cunning Little Vixen* (Victorian Opera).

This year, Trudy will design the lighting for the Australian tour of *Grease* (Crossroads Live), *Eucalyptus* (Victorian Opera), *McMuffin Park* for Ensemble Theatre, and *The World of Wearable Art* in Wellington New Zealand for the third year.

Recent lighting designs include *Mousetrap* (Crossroads Live), *The Woman in Black* (Ensemble Theatre), *The World of Wearable Art* (Wellington, NZ), *A Little Night Music* (Victorian Opera), *Cunning Little Vixen* (Victorian Opera, WA Opera and SOSA), *Macbeth* (WA Opera), *In the Heights* (Hayes Theatre and Sydney Opera House), *Cat Stevens' A Cat's Attic* Tour (Australia and NZ) and *Melba* (Hayes Theatre).



## RICHARD MILLS AO

Cover Conductor

Internationally recognised composer Richard Mills, AO, Senior Fellow, Faculty of Music, at the University of Melbourne, pursues a diverse career as composer, conductor and artistic director, with an extensive discography of orchestral works including his own compositions.

Richard's posts have included Artistic Director of Victorian Opera, Artistic Director of West Australian Opera, Artistic Director of the Adelaide Chamber Orchestra, Director of the Australian Music Project for Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and Musica Viva's Composer of the Year. He has also been the recipient of an Ian Potter Foundation Fellowship. Richard's recording of Franz Waxman's film music with the QSO was awarded the *Preis der Deutschen Schallplatten Kritik* in 1992.

Most recently Richard has conducted the Sydney Symphony Orchestra for an ABC recording as part of their 50 Fanfares project, as well as the world premiere of his new opera, *Galileo*, Jessica Pratt in concert, *Elektra*, *Butterfly Lovers* (Mills), *La Cenerentola* and *Salome* for Victorian Opera; *Glimpses and Dialogues from Galileo* at Perth Festival; *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, a gala concert and *Tosca* for Opera Queensland; *Voss* and *Summer of the 17<sup>th</sup> Doll* for State Opera South Australia; *The Sound of History* with Adelaide Symphony at Adelaide Festival, and the world premiere of his Christmas oratorio *Nativity* with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. His opera *Butterfly Lovers* was also performed in collaboration with Wild Rice Theatre Company in a sold-out season at the Victoria Theatre, Singapore.



*Brisbane Season of Eucalyptus, 2024*  
*Photo: Billie Wilson Coffey*



## CAST



**DESIREE FRAHN**

Ellen

Originally hailing from country South Australia, soprano Desiree Frahn is a graduate of the Elder Conservatorium, and alumni of the 2014/15 State Opera of South Australia James and Diana Ramsey Foundation Opera Program. With State Opera she has performed as Mabel (*Pirates of Penzance*), Musetta (*La bohème*), Julie Jordan (*Carouse!*), Leila (*The Pearl Fishers*), Pamina (*The Magic Flute*), The Cunning Little Vixen, Valencienne (*The Merry Widow*), Rose Pickles (*Cloudstreet*, world premier), Rosalinda (*Die Fledermaus*) and sung as a soloist in tours, concerts and broadcasts.

For Australian Contemporary Opera Co, she performed the Australian premiere of Stephanie in *To Hell and Back*, and has reprised the role several times. She is a regular soloist with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra in both new and established works, and has sung with the Adelaide Festival, Adelaide Chamber Orchestra, Melbourne Chorale and Elder Conservatorium Orchestra.



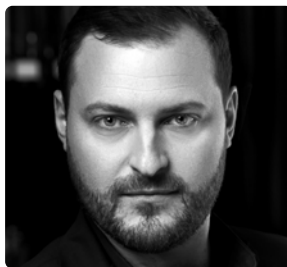
**SIMON MEADOWS**

Holland

Award-winning Australian baritone Simon Meadows enjoys a busy opera and concert career throughout Europe, Asia and Australasia.

For Opera Australia, he recently sang Telramund (*Lohengrin*) and The Count (*Le nozze di Figaro*). For Victorian Opera, Priam in Simon Bruckard's *Cassandra* and Jimmy in Stuart Greenbaum's *The Parrot Factory*. Simon was the baritone soloist in the world premiere of Richard Mills' song cycle *In Tempore Bello*.

For Melbourne Opera, Simon has performed the title roles in *Macbeth* and *The Barber of Seville*, Alberich in *Das Rheingold* and many others. In 2021, he sang Alfio/Tonio in *Cavalleria rusticana/Pagliacci* for West Australian Opera and returned to Perth as Germont (*La traviata*).



**MICHAEL PETRUCCELLI**

The Stranger

Recently a Young Artist with Oper Frankfurt and renowned for his 'pure, glowing tenor', Michael Petruccelli is one of Australia's emerging operatic stars.

For Opera Australia, he has sung Stephen Goldring (*The Eighth Wonder*), Pedro (*Two Weddings, One Bride*) and Goro (*Madama Butterfly*).

In 2021 and 2022, Michael sang Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville* for West Australian Opera. For Victorian Opera, he appeared in *Parrwang Lifts the Sky*; Le Mesurier in *Voss* for State Opera of South Australia; and Jason in *Medée* for Pinchgut Opera.

In 2023, he returned to Victorian Opera in *Galileo* and *Capriccio* and to Pinchgut Opera for *The Pleasures of Versailles*.



**SAMUEL DUNDAS**  
Mr Cave

Samuel Dundas, a former member of Victorian Opera's Artist Development and Opera Australia's Moffatt Oxenbould Young Artist Programs, now performs leading roles with Opera Australia, the Australian State Opera companies and New Zealand Opera. He also appears regularly with the major Australian symphony orchestras and choral societies.

Most recently, Samuel has been heard in Faure's *Requiem* (TSO), Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (Auckland Philharmonia), Perth Festival *Galileo* excerpts (Mills), as Donner (*Das Rheingold*) for SSO, Count (*Capriccio*) for Victorian Opera, Wolfram (*Tannhäuser*) for Opera Australia, Marcello (*La bohème*) for WA Opera, Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle* (Festival of Voices), Aphron (*The Golden Cockerel*) and the title role in *Voss* and Marcello for State Opera South Australia.



**NATALIE JONES**  
Sprunt Sister

As a principal soprano with Opera Australia, Natalie has performed Juliette in *Romeo et Juliette*, the title role in *Manon*, Konstanze & Blondchen in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, Musetta in *La bohème*, Königin der Nacht in *Die Zauberflöte*, Zerbinetta in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Gilda in *Rigoletto*, Adina in *L'elisir d'amore*, Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Oscar in *Un ballo in Maschera*, Morgana in *Alcina*, Eurydice & Cupid in *Orpheus in the Underworld*, Josephine in *H.M.S. Pinafore*, Casilda in *The Gondoliers*, Hero in *The Love of the Nightingale* and Bubba in *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* (Richard Mills).

She has sung *Königin der Nacht* for the Volksoper in Vienna; Woglinde in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* for State Opera South Australia; Adele in *Die Fledermaus* and the title role in *Patience* for West Australian Opera; Adina and Königin der Nacht for Opera Queensland as well as Gilda and Königin der Nacht for Oz Opera National Tours. Alongside her operatic work, Natalie has performed extensively on the concert platform throughout Australia and New Zealand.



**DIMITY SHEPHERD**  
Sprunt Sister

Dimity's appearances for Victorian Opera include Green Room Award-winning performances in *Lorelei*, Cherubino in *Marriage Of Figaro*, Orphée in *Orphée et Eurydice*, Alice in *Through The Looking Glass*, Arsamene in *Xerxes*, Nireno in *Julius Caesar*, Flora in *Traviata*, Beggar Woman in *Sweeney Todd*, Helpmann and Green Room Award-nominated Lucy in *Threepenny Opera*, Clara in *Midnight Son*, roles in *Banquet Of Secrets*, *The Riders*, *Nixon In China* and *Sunday In The Park With George*.

Other roles include Cherubino and Carmen, as well as Rosina in *Barber of Seville* for Opera Australia. Roles for Opera Queensland and Chamber Made Opera include Fricka in *Die Walküre* for Melbourne Opera, Kätchen in *The Black Rider* for the Malthouse, the title role in *The Ghost Wife* at London's Barbican BITE02 festival, and the vocalist in the Australian Ballet's *Anna Karenina*.

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# 2025

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Victorian Opera is the state opera company of Victoria. Your state company. We make creative, accessible and relevant work while acknowledging our artform's traditions and evolution.

Recognised for our unique contribution to the country's operatic landscape, Victorian Opera joined the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework in 2021. Alongside other companies, Victorian Opera holds its rightful position in the national performing arts arena.

Commitment to the development and presentation of new Australian opera and musical theatre is forefront to our mission. We identify relative and topical material, commission and workshop new scores and librettos, and ultimately produce new productions. Victorian Opera premieres at least one new Australian opera or music theatre work each year, and has commissioned 39 new works since the company's formation.

The next generation of talent is developed from the ground up through our Emerging Artists Programs – The Victorian Opera Youth Chorus Ensemble (VOYCE), our VO Emerges project and our Emerging Artists Opera Prize scholarship. Creating future pathways for artists, artisans and technicians has become a driving focus for our organisation.

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

We embrace the new normal and continue to perform in exceptional theatres and concert halls to give you the best and safest experience. Join us to experience the human voice, the indefinable power of music and storytelling at its finest.

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**Elizabeth Hill-Cooper**  
Victorian Opera CEO

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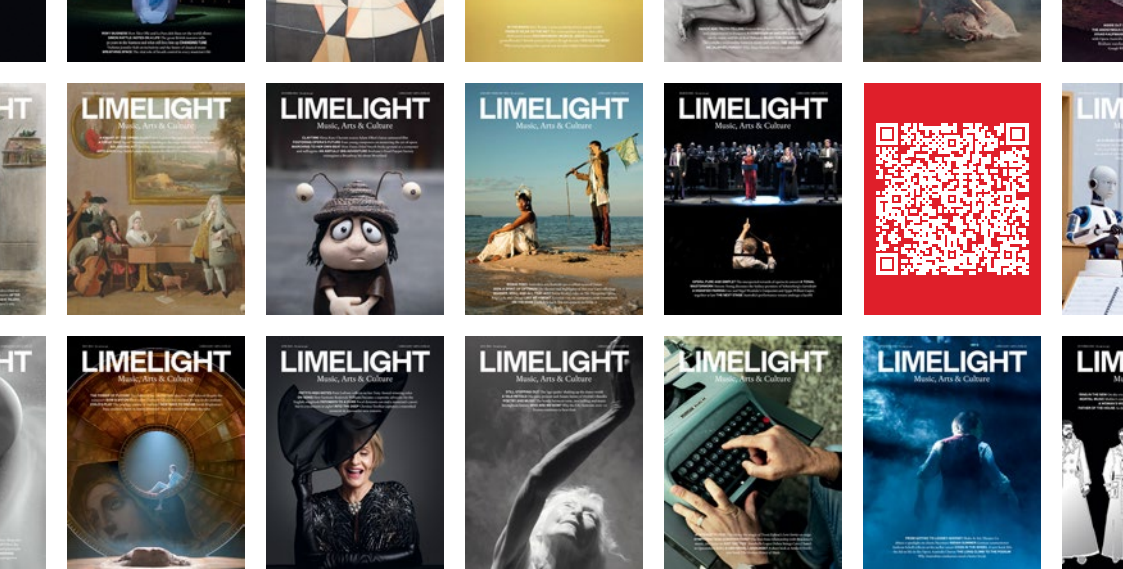
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