



STATE OPERA  
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Sunday, 9 August 2020

**THE FRIENDS OF THE STATE OPERA – 2020 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
REPORT FROM STUART MAUNDER AM, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, STATE OPERA SOUTH  
AUSTRALIA**

I penned these words in January this year, 2020, musing on the year that was:

More people attended the opera in 2019 than before in the company's history. Our box office receipts have doubled in a year.

And we have produced probably double the 'usual' State Opera output.

We presented the Adelaide season of Baroque specialists The Gabrielli Consort with Purcell's King Arthur and were to co-winners of the Helpmann Award for our efforts.

5000 people crammed into Victoria Square in the heart of the city for an outdoor Carmen. We presented the first SA performances of Janacek's Cunning Little Vixen... showcasing the mighty ASO into the bargain.

We presented three Australian operas in intimate surroundings, three different directors, one conductor to lead the music making: the first in a series of The Lost Operas of OZ.

Simone Young brought her passion and power to an evening dedicated to Richard Strauss and his celebration of the female voice. And we had four great voices: Lisa Gasteen, Catherine Carby, Emma Matthews, and Miriam Gordon Stewart who entranced the Town Hall audience.

We presented the first repertoire season in the Festival Theatre since 1999: Madama Butterfly and Mikado. Both garnering 5-star reviews and not a whiff of Cultural appropriation!

And two wonderful recitals at Ukaria: Morgan Pearse and Chad Vinten and Wallis Giunta and Philip Mayers. And that last-mentioned singer was the only overseas import for the year, apart from three New Zealanders.

And to top it all off in the yearly wrap ups for cultural endeavour The Lost Operas got Cultural Event of the year for Adelaide in The Australian on Dec 31 but Mikado was included in list of Best Regional production in Limelight's 2019 List...We managed to deliver the standard rep with integrity.

We gave many Australian jobs... we kicked many artistic goals.

Biggest delight is there is an audience here with a desire to see operatic fair. To also they like a good event. You can do something like Carmen and people will go even if they have seen it many times before because it is in a different venue. If you are talking about a 'bums on seats' opera that they have seen many times before maybe they need something special to go to. Is it an extraordinary cast? Is it a quirky production? Is it the fact that it is an international product that has succeeded everywhere else?

There is an audience for lighter stuff, like Gilbert and Sullivan. It may be more attenuated than I thought however the audience is there.

There is a small, devoted audience for Australian works. It is also the work that garners most interest and bouquets from the musical fraternity and funders. We need to be leaders in this area.

These productions can further enhance the 'Exclusive to Adelaide' brand.

Many of our audience like an adventure. They'll go to Bowden Plant 4 for Dido. Why not a Lost Opera or two?

In 2021 we should rethink our use of the Festival Theatre. What is the point in going to a place that has no parking, is difficult to negotiate, is expensive and has a capacity too large for our needs. We must find a way to make Her Majesty's Theatre work for us. It should be our home. It has a capacity that is right for this company.

We will be trying to repeat the experience that was Carmen in The Square, everybody tells us that is safer...

And Standard rep is still the 'way in' for many new audiences. If we want to capture these people, plus get out traditional audience to 'reoffend' we should reinvent the repertoire, interesting space,

And now the future:

The immediate possibilities for operatic performance and creation are governed by border restrictions, limited international and interstate travel and 50% audience limits. This cannot be a 'recovery' strategy; rather it is 'living with' strategy. Will audiences return? Will theatres be able to play to full capacity? Can a company survive by only using only local artists and arts-workers. Has a subscription season finally gone the way of the dinosaurs?

We are entering a period of 'Survival of the Nimblest'.

We must create a company, which can bend, roll with the punches, and then punch back...and yes, continue to punch above its weight. We must employ as many artists and arts workers as our budgets will allow.

Although it is now less likely that interstate and international travel will form a sizeable part of our audience, State Opera is committed to creating and developing the point of difference between our company and other Australian companies; State Opera is the company that creates, develops, performs and celebrates operas created in our country. We proudly showcase the 'Australia' in our name. We will continue produce Australian Operas on a regular basis. These will range from chamber works with small, works for young people to main stage works.

We will continue to develop new works and presenting quirky, staging of chamber works creating opportunities for existing and new audiences to enjoy a more intimate opera experience.

Through our annual Summer Schools, we will continue to find participatory education opportunities to nurture appreciation and development of the next generation of opera practitioners.

In addition to presenting Australian works, and complementary offerings State Opera must perform works of the operatic canon on the main stage, works of scale. However, we must create in a more economical way.

As outdoor sports events continue to be played to large audiences we will continue to present 'Event opera'. These productions will allow up to 5000 people to experience the work for one performance only. As with our successful Carmen in 2019 these operas will be drawn from the top 10 opera list thus providing a point of entry for a wider, new audience to experience the art form in non-traditional spaces.

While Event Operas will maintain a focus on the most performed operas, we will continue to program Complementary Operas to include performances of lesser-known works and innovative presentations of some popular works. As well as creating product in Adelaide we will actively engage with state companies to create product, which will utilise Australian creative teams.

And it is going to be great!  
See you at the opera.

Stuart Maunder  
Artistic Director, State Opera South Australia