

STATE OPERA
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

What an honour it is to work for this company. I still find it awe inspiring to work in this extraordinary art form. It truly is a pleasure to come to work each day. And that has included trying to negotiate these very 'interesting' times. During a year devastated by Covid we attempted to do all in our power to engage with our audience, employ our artists and try to get train, develop and while waiting to get back to doing stuff we are trained to do.

For our rapidly developing on-line platform we recorded excerpts from our 2018 *Red Cross Gala* to commemorate Anzac Day 2020. Recording this repertoire: ballads, popular songs, Gilbert and Sullivan provided us with a point of difference to other companies; nobody else is recording this material.

Three of our local artists Desiree Frahn, Joanna McWaters and Pelham Andrews, accompanied by Anthony Hunt recorded six arias which we posted as *Arias from the Archives*. These pieces were representative of major moments in the history of State Opera. In addition we posted several podcasts which featured great singers from State Opera's past. All this complementary material has found an audience. As any of our traditional audience have now been forced to become 'tech savvy' we have found much engagement with the company 'online'. Here's to harnessing that new-found knowledge to help sell our 'real' operas in the future.

Now to the stuff we are funded to present! Thankfully we've just finished a season of what I believe is the greatest horror story ever set to music...and I believe it was done at such an exemplary level: Sweeney Todd. This great work could not have been better received both critically and from word of mouth. Anecdotally we seem to have attracted a different, many believe younger audience. Ben Mingay was a great audience pleaser, vocally very strong and with charisma to burn. Antoinette Halloran as Mrs Lovett was the heart and soul of the piece. The two made a thoroughly disreputable, comic and riveting pair of serial killers. The supporting cast and the hardworking ensemble drawn from the State Opera Chorus were exemplary. And presiding over Sondheim's great score was our Head of Music and Chorus Master Anthony Hunt. This was a great 'company' show, challenging in every way and to every department.

In late March we performed our first season for 2021: a triumphant, sold-out, two performance season of *Carousel* on stage of the Festival Theatre. This Rodgers and Hammerstein classic was brought to life by an extraordinary Australian cast led by music theatre and television star Ben Mingay and local opera star Desiree Frahn. The State Opera chorus, prepared by Anthony Hunt belted and danced their way through this great score all under the careful, focussed eye of conductor Brett Weymark. With its dark subject matter, and restorative themes of hope and healing this was great way to start the year. This was a great season, and underlines how far our company has come in being able to 'turn on a dime'; flexible, dynamic, ambitious, hungry.

And after a year that was devastated by Covid...we still managed to get *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* up last November, to be reduced to a season of one performance by the Pizza-gate lockdown. We were incredibly happy with the response to *Doll*, a beautiful elegiac of this great story, brought

to life with great integrity and care by conductor/composer Richard Mills and Director Joe Mitchell. It was a wonderful performance, and I believe fully justified our belief in continuing this new found tradition of presenting Australian works.

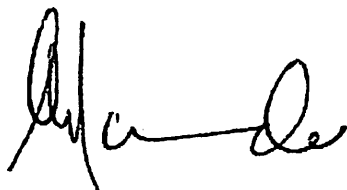
And speaking of Australian works... later this coming we are presenting local composer Graeme Koehne's Love Burns at Bowden Plant 4. I've been lucky enough to be in rehearsal this week, and local cast, brilliantly directed by Nicholas Cannon, conducted by Anthony Hunt....its funny, quirky, some beautiful music...It's a great venue, know to many of you who enjoyed our Dido and Aeneas in 2018.

But we live in bizarre, uncertain times. Look what's happened just this last few days. The immediate possibilities for operatic performance and creation are governed by outside influences: border restrictions, limited international and interstate travel and audience limits. the company can no longer sell a year-long subscription package. We are entering a period of 'Survival of the Niblest'. We are a company which can bend, roll with the punches, and then punch back...and yes, continue to punch above its weight. We need to allow as much flexibility as possible in programming our seasons; as soon as we have some surety that we will be able to proceed with a venture we will launch new offerings. I'm pleased to announce we will return to the Her Majesty's Theatre in September and in November with two great operas, both classics of their particular genres.

This company has always produced a balanced programme to appeal to, and satisfy, audiences in South Australia. We at State Opera is committed to producing the finest, most theatrically and musically interesting shows in this great state. We value the ongoing support of our family of Friends and we will continue to produce work that will delight and edify you, our loyal audiences and hopefully find more converts.

As we all know the best way to support your opera company is to attend our shows. You are our best advocates. We're open for business again, in a big way! Spread the word, please.

See you at the Opera!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graeme Koehne', written in a cursive style.

27/5/2021