



**THE FRIENDS OF THE STATE OPERA OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA INC.
President's Report
45th Annual General Meeting - 30 May 2021**

Welcome to all our Friends attending the 2021 AGM of The Friends and thank you to all Friends Members whose continued support of opera in South Australia is so important to the continuation of the peak performing art form that is opera.

I was reflecting on the purpose of The Friends and what we do as an organisation in terms of sponsorship, supporting young and emerging artists, attending productions, fund raising, informing and educating, and asked myself what is the impact of these activities and what difference do they make; and for me the answer is to keep opera alive and vibrant in our state and to enable state opera to provide 'more opera for more people'. This is our mission and why we exist.

Support for opera, from Friends Members, during this difficult time when Australia and the World is gripped by a pandemic which has so disrupted our lives and particularly the performing arts, is exemplified by the decision, by so many Members, to provide extra financial support in 2021.

Your Friends Committee decided to offer, in 2021, a choice of membership annual payments; either the standard fee, or a reduced fee combined with a voluntary donation to The Friends tax-deductible public fund that directly supports opera. It is wonderful that so many of you chose this latter option and, as you will hear in our Treasurer's report, this resulted in a substantial increase in our public fund. This money will help us to support both development of opera and opera singers and creatives in South Australia and the work of State Opera. So, well done to our generous membership!

The pandemic has inevitably affected The Friends and State Opera's ability to put on events and performances. Despite this State Opera has made valiant attempts in the last 12 months to bring opera performances to life. The scheduled season of "Summer of the 17th Doll" was tragically curtailed early because of yet another local cluster, but let me say as one of those fortunate enough to have seen the opening performance that this was a great credit to the entire State Opera team. We are so fortunate to have such talented and committed people working for State Opera. In 2021 State Opera has ramped up their performance offerings and reimagined what is possible, utilising talent available locally in South Australia and Australia and showing what is possible. This is no better exemplified than by the recent triumphant season of "Sweeney Todd", a sell out and critical success.

The Friends can be truly proud that we continue to support the work of State Opera and our local creatives and performers. Just as State Opera had to curtail performances in 2020, then reinvigorate production offerings in 2021, so your Friends Committee has sought to provide more Friends offerings in 2021, following the necessary and comparatively barren 2020.

I want to thank Pauline Brooks OAM and all those on the Events Sub-committee for their hard work in putting together a programme of functions for 2021. Their series of “Afternoon High Teas” has already started successfully, with the first featuring an illuminating conversation with Denis Olsen AM and Dale Ringland about June Bronhill, in association with the launch of a biography on her life by Richard Davis, entitled ‘A Star on her Door’.

The second high tea was an equally engaging conversation and music from Anthony Hunt and his opera singer wife, Jessica Dean, who took those present on their artistic journey through ‘Words and Music’. Everyone I spoke with afterwards said they could have listened for longer to this charming and dynamic duo. Again, we are so lucky to have such talent in SA; Anthony is Head of Music and Chorus Master at State Opera and Jessica often performs in State Opera productions. Both feature in the forthcoming production of “Love Burns”.

Thanks to our strong relationship with State Opera and as part of the Partnership Agreement between State Opera and The Friends, which is reviewed annually, there have been two “Behind the Scenes” events, for “Summer of the 17th Doll” and “Sweeney Todd”.

These special events enable Members to see part of a production rehearsal and hear from the leading creatives behind the productions, in conversation with our own Christopher Stone. Pandemic restrictions have limited available places at these events, but they have been strongly supported by The Friends Members and have also attracted non-members, thanks to the co-operation of State Opera in advertising the events on their website and providing a link to The Friends Trybooking site. These events have been a wonderful way to better understand what goes into major State Opera productions, making our attendance at the actual performances so much more meaningful.

As I have already mentioned, State Opera and The Friends have renewed their Partnership Agreement for 2021. The agreement acknowledges The Friends sponsorship of \$25,000 for a main stage production, which will take place later this year, (hopefully to be announced in the not too distant future) and sponsorship of, \$2,000.00 for SA tenor Kim Worley to attend the inaugural Winter Opera Academy (postponed Summer Opera Academy) in July 2021. We also provided \$5,000.00 to support Arias from the Archives during 2020. State Opera facilitates and supports the Behind the Scenes with The Friends, and provides additional benefits that include VIP opening night tickets to The Friends sponsored production and to Winter Opera Academy performances, hosting information about The Friends on the State Opera

website and providing advance notice for on-sale of selected productions and events. The Friends in return assist with State Opera fundraising events and both organisations advertise each other's events, as appropriate, via their respective communication channels.

As The Friends member on the Board of State Opera I have attended regular meetings of the Board and voiced the views of The Friends. However, Board discussions are confidential and I leave it to our State Opera representatives to tell us about State Opera affairs. Suffice it to say we have strong reasons for optimism about opera in our state and can be proud of the responsible, committed and innovative management structure at State Opera. You can have confidence that State Opera will continue to provide more opera for more people.

Of course we support opera in other ways, particularly development of young artists and this has continued despite the pandemic. Our support for Charlotte Kelso to undertake a Master's degree at the Royal Academy of Music, London, is just one of the recent examples of this support.

The Friends have through the provision of \$2,000.00 for the biennial Adelaide Eisteddfod Dawn Wallace Award, named after a past secretary of The Friends, supported young and emerging artists, many of whom have gone on to sing with State Opera. The award was cancelled last year but will be held again this year. Adelaide Eisteddfod approached The Friends to discuss how the finals of the Award are marketed and supported. At this stage The Friends committee has requested more information from Adelaide Eisteddfod and although exploratory talks have taken place, no commitment has been made.

Other developments since the last AGM include;

Top Note Winery, has become a sponsor of The Friends, donating wine for Friends events and providing discount offers to members on cellar door and on-line sales. Cate and Nick Foskett own Top Note Wines. You may better know Cate Foskett as local soprano, Cate Barr, who has also offered to perform at selected Friends events.

The Friends now have a Facebook Page, thank you to Alex Bond for developing and launching this initiative.

The quarterly Friends newsletter continues as a means of communicating Friends and State Opera news. Thank you to Julian White AM for providing his desktop publishing expertise and time.

Thank you to State Opera, executive and its staff and the Board of State Opera, chaired by John Irving, for your support, encouragement and input.

Finally, I wish to thank all the hard working members of your Friends Committee, a great team of people, Christopher Stone (Vice President), Yvonne McMurray (Treasurer), Johan Bruwer (secretary), Pauline Brooks OAM, Robina Weir, Helen Haines, John Tuckey, Susan Bethune and Alex Bond who have given generously and voluntarily

of their time and who have worked so well together in the last year with never failing energy and enthusiasm. Alex Bond has decided to retire from the committee and I thank him for his contribution.

I think we have reason to be optimistic about what the next 12 months will bring for The Friends, State Opera and opera in SA.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dr Beata M Byok'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Dr Beata M Byok
30 May 2021