

'Ruby' for a State Opera gem



Timothy Sexton with his 2008 Ruby Award, together with Kate Gould, Chair of the Ruby Awards judging panel. The Ruby Awards, SA's arts and cultural awards, are named after Dame Ruby Litchfield. Photo by Heidi Linehan, heidi who? Photos.

made to happen. 'It's not a place to sit around and wait for work to come to you - you'll be sitting a long time if you do. But there are golden opportunities here.' His greatest satisfaction has come from creating projects that don't happen elsewhere. The Glass Trilogy operas are a prime example. 'Also the chance to work on operas such as *Dead Man Walking*, *Little Women* and *Ainadamar*. These projects tend to happen here in SA before they appear anywhere else in Australia, so there are good reasons to stay here!'

Timothy, whose voice is familiar to listeners to ABC Classic FM throughout Australia, is a firm believer in the importance of quality music exposure and tuition from an early age. 'Music needs to be part of the main education curriculum

from the outset' he insists. 'It is often viewed as an 'optional extra', but it's not. You only have to look at how music is regarded in Europe... We need to recapture some of the lead position this State held about twenty years ago in regard to music education. The flow-on effects will have ramifications for the tertiary sector and beyond.'

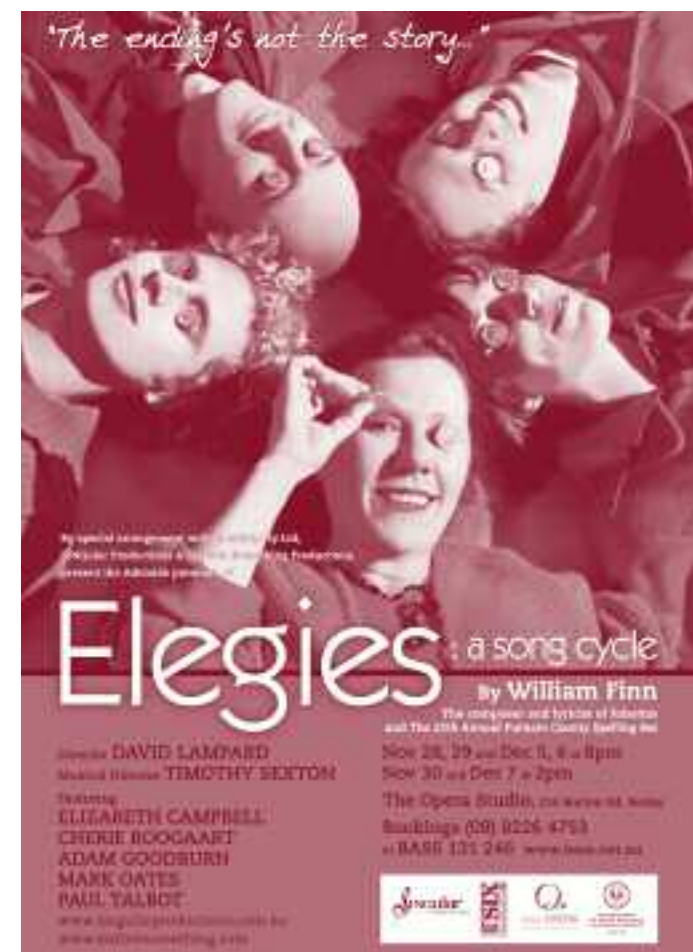
Winning the Ruby Award is a personal recognition, but Timothy is quick to point out that there are many individuals who make a sustained contribution to the arts in South Australia. 'Many are volunteers' he notes, 'and I think much more could be done to acknowledge those people and the incredible work they do. Without them, this industry would simply cave in on itself.'

Bravo Timothy!

Congratulations to Timothy Sexton, chorus master, conductor, associate conductor and provider of pre-performance talks for State Opera productions over many years; recipient of the 2008 Ruby Award for 'sustained contribution to the arts' in SA. Timothy's contribution to State Opera has been remarkable, and pursued with modesty and professionalism.

Backstage asked Timothy how he felt about being chosen for a 'Ruby'. 'It really is a great honour' he said, 'and vindicates my decision 28 years ago to forego opportunities interstate and overseas and concentrate on making a go of things here. This hasn't always been easy, since any career in the arts is fraught with uncertainty, but I have had the opportunity to work with the best practitioners in the State, and this has been incredibly rewarding.'

Timothy is convinced that South Australia is a place where, if you are persistent, things can be



Backstage

November 2008

Print Post Approved PP 565001/00029

The 2009 Season

Major new productions and star casting make State Opera's 2009 subscription season one not to be missed.

The last brand new production staged by State Opera at the Adelaide Festival Theatre was the *Ring Cycle* in 2004, so we are particularly pleased to be staging two new productions in 2009 - *La fanciulla del West*, which according to our records has never been staged in South Australia before, and *The Flying Dutchman*. Additionally, we shall be presenting *The Tales of Hoffmann* in a beautiful new production from Opera Australia that premiered in Sydney and Melbourne just last year.

Puccini's *La fanciulla del West*, perhaps better known as *The Girl of the Golden West*, is in fact a new co-production to be built by the Opera Conference, the partnership of Australia's leading companies: Opera Australia, Opera Queensland, West Australian Opera and State Opera. The conference was established in 1995 with the specific purpose of applying special project funding from the Australia Council to commission jointly new opera productions. A specific requirement of Opera Conference productions is that they be designed for staging in the various theatres nationally without major modifications. So, in addition to driving our opera dollar further, these joint productions ensure cost efficient transfers whilst allowing each company to engage its own casts and conductors. Productions created by the Conference since 1995 have included *Eugene Onegin*, *Falstaff*, *Manon Lescaut*, *Samson et Dalila*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Romeo et Juliette*, *Andrea Chenier*, *Cav & Pag*, *La bohème*, *Norma*, *Barber of Seville* and *Nabucco*. The new Opera Conference production for 2008 is *Aida*. It had its premiere in Perth, presented by West

Australian Opera, in October this year, and will be seen in Sydney and Melbourne next year presented by Opera Australia. So prepare for some triumphal marching in Adelaide in 2010!

The brand new production of *The Flying Dutchman* will be created by two outstanding local theatre identities: director Chris Drummond and designer Geoff Cobham. Both are well known in Adelaide for their highly praised work with the State Theatre Company, Brink Productions, and the Adelaide Festival. They now have the much-deserved opportunity to engage with State Opera in creating what promises to be an exciting and innovative interpretation of one of Wagner's most popular operas. The production will include the use of cutting edge design technology, lighting and special effects, which I'm convinced will sustain and enhance the atmosphere of Wagner's great score.

The Tales of Hoffmann hasn't been staged in Adelaide since the mid 1980's, so it is a great pleasure to bring to Adelaide Stuart Maunder's acclaimed production of this beautiful work.

All three productions feature star casts made up of many of Australia's most admired and respected singers including Emma Matthews, Antoinette Halloran, Sally-Anne Russell, Elizabeth Campbell, Gaye Macfarlane, John Wegner, Rosario La Spina, Stuart Skelton, Daniel Sumegi, Douglas McNicol, Andrew Collis and Richard Anderson. It is also a great pleasure to welcome back to Adelaide, New Zealand soprano Margaret Medlyn, and also to welcome to Australia for the first time tenor Dario Volonte from Argentina.

Stephen Phillips
General Director



- THE TALES OF HOFFMANN**
4, 7, 9, 11 July - Festival Theatre
- THE GIRL OF THE GOLDEN WEST**
29 August, 1, 3, 5 September - Festival Theatre
- THE FLYING DUTCHMAN**
7, 10, 12, 14 November - Festival Theatre
- THE SHOUTING FENCE** March - The Opera Studio
- David Hobson & Teddy Tahu Rhodes in Concert** 3 March - Festival Theatre
- DEAR EDWINA** April - The Opera Studio
- MIRIAM ALLAN, IRONWOOD ENSEMBLE in Concert** - 26 March Adelaide Town Hall
- VERDI REQUIEM** 29, 30 May - Festival Theatre
- BEETHOVEN'S 9th SYMPHONY**
25 July - Festival Theatre

For your copy of our 2009 season brochure, phone 08-8226 4790 or download from www.saopera.sa.gov.au

BACKSTAGE is edited by Peter Bassett and printed in South Australia by Hyde Park Press. To receive State Opera information on line, please Email: info@saopera.sa.gov.au

The State Opera of South Australia thanks the following companies and organisations for their generous financial support:



Judith Branford – *Lioness of the Wardrobe*

Talented and dedicated Head of Wardrobe, Judith Branford, marks her 25th anniversary with the State Opera this year. *Backstage* joins Judith's many friends and colleagues in offering congratulations. We spoke to her about her years with the company.

Judith has worked with five General Directors and numerous designers since 1983, and counts amongst her production highlights the 1991 *Elektra*, 1993 *Macbeth*, the *Rings* of 1998 and 2004 and *Parsifal* of 2001. She especially enjoys being part of the creative process for new productions, although this sometimes means having to transform a designer's briefest squiggles and barest outlines into fabric, fur, livery and lace. Judith recalls one occasion when the 'designs' she received were just quick pen sketches dashed off on Hilton Hotel notepaper. Then began the process of divining and defining exactly what the designer had in mind, researching historical drawings and finding ways to turn ideas into substance.



Nevertheless, such involvement in the total creative process is very satisfying, says Judith.

In most instances, costume designs are detailed and accompanied by samples of fabrics indicating colours and textures. Because Australia's clothing industry has, to a large extent, moved off shore in recent years, there has been a drying-up of fabric supplies in this country. Nobody holds

quantities of stock any more, says Judith, and fabrics often have to be sourced from Europe. Delivery takes much longer, and this must be factored into production times.

The company does use some local suppliers however, mainly for specialist items. When a coat of chain mail was required for Poul Elming in *Parsifal*, a lady in the country was commissioned to knit the 'mail' out of Russian braid. However, during dyeing the coat shrank, and so more braid had to be found in a hurry, and a second version knitted.

The State Opera wardrobe holds a large collection of shoes, but occasionally, new footwear has to be made for particular roles. Judith says that usually, shoe making is done in whatever city the singer can arrange fittings. Six weeks must be allowed to make bespoke shoes, and if a singer is not going to arrive in Adelaide in time for this, then he or she must be fitted elsewhere.

As with the rest of us, singers' shapes change over time, and keeping track of the latest 'ins' and 'outs' for costume cutting can be tricky. Judith often does this by checking with the last opera company for whom singers have performed. Most opera costumes are made with generous seams, a useful feature when a 'cover' artist has to step into a role at the last minute. With rare exceptions, 'covers' do not have separate costumes made for them, and

so wardrobe assistants must be standing by to make adjustments.

Few singers use their own jewellery on stage these days, although this was quite a common practice in past centuries, when *prime donne* also insisted on wearing their own costumes! Judith recalls an occasion in 2000 when Joan Carden stepped in at a few hours notice to sing Tosca in Adelaide and wore her own jewellery worth many thousands of dollars. Because her arrival was so last minute, not even her dresser knew that the necklace and earrings sparkling beautifully in the spotlights were the real things. After the second act, these items were simply put away with the costume jewellery. Only when Miss Carden asked about them during the post-performance reception did the truth dawn. A quick dash to the dressing room located the genuine articles amongst the paste, and they were soon back in the hands of their grateful owner.

State Opera is fortunate to have Judith in its team.

Underneath – brings opera and community together

Director Lindy Hume's fascinating concept of using Monteverdi's seminal work *L'Orfeo* to mix a community chorus with professional singers and musicians was given substance at State Opera's Netley studio in September. The audience was invited to follow the singers as they chartered Orpheus's journey to the underworld and witness his consuming grief at the loss of his wife Eurydice. A fifteen-member community ensemble of volunteers, each of whom had experienced bereavement, recited statements of personal loss at key points in the story. Thus real-life experience was added to the Orpheus journey – the Grief journey – whilst projected images of treasured memories and stylised dramatisations were woven into the drama, all set to Monteverdi's beautiful music.

This new 'Baroque Project' also involved musicians Graham Abbott and Timothy Sexton and lighting designer Nigel Levings.

'The central idea behind *Underneath*, said Lindy Hume, is that the 3,000-year-old myth of Orpheus, whose journey may be a poetic metaphor for the real life experience of deep grief and ultimate acceptance of the death of a loved one, is a 'rite of passage' story that belongs to all communities, to our time and place: Adelaide 2008.'

'It is really hard to bring opera and community together' she said, 'and it's really hard to get people to feel it in their solar plexis.' *Underneath* did just that, and proved a moving and engaging experience for audience and performers alike.



We all play a part in building stronger communities

From the Sydney Opera House to the Walkington Theatre in Karratha, the performing arts play a vital role in building stronger and more sustainable communities in Australia. Performing arts venues and touring companies are a hub for local cultural activity, promoting inclusion and community development.

Working with the Australian Performing Arts Centres Association (APACA), this campaign to draws national attention to the fundamental role local venues, companies, Local Government and community organizations play in building a stronger sense of community through partnerships in the performing arts.

To find out more about the campaign and register as a supporter of We All Play a Part, log on to www.weallplayapart.com.au

'These are some of the cleverest ideas that may have yet been applied to Monteverdi's 400 year-old opera *L'Orfeo*.' - Graham Strahle in *The Australian*.

Below: Adam Goodburn (Orpheus) and Kristen Hardy (Music/Hope).

Right: Lindy Hume

Far Right: Adam Goodburn (Orpheus), Fiona Linn (Eurydice) and members of the community ensemble.

Photos by Rocky Feo/Photografeo Pty Ltd.

