

Todd McKenney and Mitchell Butel star in Jonathan Biggins' riotous production of *Orpheus in the Underworld*



Production image with portrait photos (clockwise from top left) Todd McKenney, Mitchell Butel, Jonathan Biggins and Rachelle Durkin.

Get ready for one of the most unruly and raucous nights at the opera, complete with the 'can-can', with **Jonathan Biggins'** riotous and gorgeous production of *Orpheus in the Underworld*. The worlds of musical theatre and comic opera collide when the sensational song-and-dance man, **Todd McKenney** (*The Boy from Oz*, *Annie the Musical*) takes the lead as Aristaeus/Pluto in Biggins' topical version of *Orpheus in the Underworld*. And who better to partner McKenney onstage than the king of comic-timing, **Mitchell Butel**, who had audiences in stitches in Opera Australia's *The Mikado*. Joining this dynamic duo is soprano **Rachelle Durkin** with her dazzling voice and infectious humour. Together, this terrific trio are sure to keep the show moving at an entertaining pace. *Orpheus in the Underworld* is at **Sydney Opera House from February 28 to March 27**.

The stylish fooling and newly-minted satire by Biggins and fellow wit **Phil Scott** re-ignites Offenbach's 1850s parody to make its vision of lust and power ripe for the times. The sparkling melodies, cartoonish delights, pyrotechnics (yes, really!) and fast-paced dance routines make the production a treat for all ages.

Designer **Mark Thompson's** imaginative towers and temples, and gorgeous and witty costumes create a setting as vibrant and bright as a Broadway musical. With its frenzied pace, sight gags and a show-stopping finale, this is sure to be the most fun-filled event of the summer season.

About the work:

Right from its premiere in Paris in 1858, Jacques Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld* was a runaway success, running for extended seasons in Paris, New York and London. The composer's most ambitious operetta to date (and regarded as the first classical full-length operetta), *Orpheus* lampoons Greek mythology and culminates in the somewhat risqué 'Infernal Galop', better known to today's audiences as the 'can-can'.

About the artists:

One of Australia's sharpest satirists, **Jonathan Biggins** is perhaps best known for his long-running gig as writer, director and performer in Sydney Theatre Company's annual Wharf Revue. As a director, he won a Helpmann award in 2010 for the national tour of *Avenue Q* (starring Mitchell Butel). Other directing credits include *The Republic of Myopia* for STC and David Williamson's *Flatfoot* for Ensemble Theatre.

Inspiring, provocative, compelling and generous are just a few words that describe the critically acclaimed and award-winning performer, actor and host, **Todd McKenney**. McKenney's versatile career was kick-started by the prized role of Peter Allen in the hit production *The Boy From Oz*. His reign as Australia's leading man of song and dance musicals confirms his status as a household name with performances in *42nd Street*, *West Side Story*, *Camelot*, *Pirates of Penzance*, *Cabaret*, *Strictly Ballroom*, *La Cage aux Folles*, *Singin' In the Rain*, *Annie the Musical* and many more. Since 1994 he's been the 'colourful' and often controversial judge on the Channel 7 hit series *Dancing With the Stars*. *Orpheus in the Underworld* marks his debut with Opera Australia.



Triple Helpmann Award-winner **Mitchell Butel** makes his welcome return to Opera Australia after an hilarious performance in *The Mikado* in 2011. He has worked extensively for all of Australia's major theatre companies. Music theatre credits include *Grease*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Man of La Mancha*, *Oklahoma!*, *Tomfoolery Dusty* and, in 2010, *Avenue Q*, for which he won a Helpmann Award. Most recently, Mr Butel starred in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, taking Melbourne audiences by storm. He is also the voice of the Playschool theme song!

Australian soprano **Rachelle Durkin** is one of opera's most striking sopranos performing at major houses worldwide to critical acclaim. After winning the 2001 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, Ms Durkin joined the Metropolitan Opera's Lindeman Young Artists Development Program, and has been performing with the company since then. She most recently performed for OA as Violetta in Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour: *La Traviata*.

The production brings together a dream cast of thrilling and diverse voices with tenor **Andrew Brunsdon** (Orpheus), **Katherine Wiles** (Cupid), **Stephen Smith** (Mercury) and mezzo-soprano **Suzanne Johnston** (Public Opinion) making a welcome return to the Sydney stage.

CREATIVES & CAST:

Conductor Andrew Greene	Aristaeus / Pluto Todd McKenney	Diana Jane Ede
Director Jonathan Biggins	Eurydice Rachelle Durkin	Venus Sian Pendry
Based on a concept by Ignatius Jones	Public Opinion Suzanne Johnston	Juno Victoria Lambourn
Set & Costume Designer Mark Thompson	Orpheus Andrew Brunsdon	Minos Benjamin Rasheed
Lighting Designer John Rayment	John Styx Mitchell Butel	Eachus Sitiveni Talei
Sound Designer Michael Waters	Jupiter Christopher Hillier	Rhadamanthus Richard Mitchell
Choreographer Amber Hobson	Cupid Katherine Wiles	Policemen Gregory Brown Brad Cooper, Clifford Plumpton Jonathan McCauley
	Mercury Stephen Smith	With Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra Opera Australia Chorus
	Mars Tom Hamilton	

<p>PERFORMANCE INFORMATION Evenings at 7:30pm: February 28 March 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 18, 20, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27</p> <p>Saturday Matinee at 1pm: March 2</p> <p>Sung in English with surtitles Running time: approx. 2hours 20minutes with one 20minute interval</p>	<p>BOOKINGS Tickets: From \$108 Student Rush is available at most performances. \$44 (plus transaction/handling fee) Under 30s subscription: \$60 per ticket (for a minimum of three operas)</p> <p>Opera Australia Box Office phone: (02) 9318 8200 Or online: www.opera-australia.org.au Joan Sutherland Theatre, Sydney Opera House</p>
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