



SYDNEY
CHAMBER
OPERA



SYDNEY CHAMBER OPERA

A CASE FOR SUPPORT

WHO WE ARE

Sydney Chamber Opera is the exciting new hub of contemporary opera in Sydney. Each year we bring together the most dynamic young performers and stylish theatre-makers from around the country to create productions of new and recent works by Australian and international composers. With our feet planted firmly in the 21st-century we can show you how vibrant and relevant the contemporary chamber opera can be.

WHAT WE'VE DONE

Artistic Director Jack Symonds and Louis Garrick were two highly-regarded and abundantly talented 22-year old students at the Conservatorium of Music when they decided to found Sydney Chamber Opera in 2010; they were joined soon after by their colleague Huw Belling. Six years later, SCO has grown from an undergraduate passion project into one of the brightest stars in Sydney's artistic firmament, producing contemporary chamber operas which have been enthusiastically received by festival directors, music critics and a growing band of loyal fans

SCO had humble beginnings, but was always guided by passion, dedication and rigorous musicianship. The first official independent production was an audacious undertaking: the creation and premiere of a new Australian opera, *Notes from Underground*, composed by co-founder Jack Symonds with a libretto by Pierce Wilcox (now one of our Artistic Associates, along with international soprano Jane Sheldon, star violist James Wannan, outstanding baritone Mitchell Riley, multidisciplinary theatre maker Danielle Maas and simply multitalented Huw Belling).

In the years since *Notes*, SCO has mounted seventeen productions of landmark pieces within the chamber opera repertoire, including the award-winning Australian premiere production of Britten's *Owen Wingrave*, premiering Elliott Gyger's *Fly Away Peter* and taking it to Melbourne Festival, collaborating with Ensemble Offspring on the explosive *An Index of Metals* and presenting three shows in Sydney Festival, including leading international director Pierre Audi's production of *Passion*. SCO has staged the world premieres of six new Australian operas: *Notes from Underground*, *I Have Had Enough*, *Climbing Toward Midnight*, *Mayakovsky*, *Fly Away Peter*, *Victory Over the Sun* and its seventh, *Biographica*, will be unveiled in January 2017's Sydney Festival.

Since 2014 SCO has been a resident company at Carriageworks, one of Australia's most dynamic contemporary arts organisations, and Carriageworks's cutting-edge Artistic Program has featured SCO's shows more than any other company.



Mitchell Riley in *O Mensch!*,
Sydney Festival 2016



Brenton Spiteri in *Notes from Underground*, 2016

SCO'S ARTISTIC PROGRAM

We have presented exciting and significant chamber operas that are not performed anywhere else in Australia. We seek out the greatest composers from overseas and Australia so that we can bring music from the most important contemporary classical voices to audiences here in Sydney. Composers like George Benjamin, Pascal Dusapin, György Kurtág and Giya Kancheli are titans overseas yet, to date, have been overlooked here. And we're always on the hunt for young composers to commission and promote.

But what really sets SCO apart from other contemporary music ensembles is that we're not presenting bite-size pieces of these composers' work in concert. We create large-scale, fully staged theatre pieces with professional production values. We treat operas as live works of theatrical performance, not merely concerts in costume. We set out with each production to create bold works of contemporary theatre to rival Sydney's main stage theatre companies.

To achieve this, we are endlessly discriminating and will only work with the most exciting young directors and designers to create stylish, intelligent, and aesthetically distinct productions that use the tools of the theatre to bring the complexity of this music to life.

Our collaborators to date include Sydney Theatre Company Artistic Director Kip Williams (*An Index of Metals*, *The Lighthouse*, *I Have Had Enough*), STC Resident Director Imara Savage (*Fly Away Peter*, *Owen Wingrave*, *In the Penal*

Colony), leading Melbourne directors Sarah Giles, Adena Jacobs and Janice Muller as well as fresh talent like our own Pierce Wilcox.

These talented directors train our performers to be more than singers who move. In our productions, singers are actors who use their voices and bodies to create complex and fully-rounded productions. We've been rewarded with critical acclaim, including Best Opera (Time Out Sydney for *Owen Wingrave*), Helpmann nomination for Best Opera and APRA AMCOS award for best NSW Performance (*Fly Away Peter*) and nominations for Best Opera and Best New Work (Limelight Magazine for *Notes from Underground*). SCO has been profiled often in newspapers and on television, and our productions regularly attract attention across the media. The Australian says we are consistently making "a compelling case for the resilience of opera in the 21st century" and we are "a force to be reckoned with" and the Sydney Morning Herald thinks we're "sparkling with ideas" and create "profound work".

But what's most important to us is you, our audience. With each new production our generous group of patrons and lovers of the arts increases and the small group which helped ensure *Notes from Underground* became a success has grown into a lively and energetic band of loyal supporters.

HOW WE DO IT

This exciting first phase in Sydney Chamber Opera's history didn't happen by accident. A huge amount of work and passion has been poured into all aspects of the company to get it off the ground, maintaining high production values and musical rigour.

Every production requires months of preparation, led by artistic director Jack Symonds. Jack coaches each singer individually to help them learn challenging new roles, before bringing them together to rehearse as an ensemble. This process is very time-consuming, but it is crucial that it's done thoroughly so that each singer, approaching complex new work for the very first time, attains the highest level of chamber musicianship.

Meanwhile, the director and the design team work with the company to develop a visual concept for the stage presentation. This creative and musical preparation finally comes together in production rehearsals which usually run for about 4-5 weeks leading up to the public performances. In the last 2 weeks, the orchestra comes into the picture, with Jack carefully building the musicians into the ensemble whilst the madness of "tech week" (the final days before opening night) unfolds.

This process involves up to 50 people – singers, instrumentalists, theatre-makers, technical personnel, and volunteers – who work thousands of hours in total to reach the opening night deadline.

Producing a new Australian chamber opera would normally cost about \$400,000. However, through the goodwill of both creative and production teams we have been able to present our operas at a fraction of this cost. This situation cannot go on indefinitely. We have deliberately kept ticket prices affordable (most shows are just \$35 like all performances presented by Carriageworks) to allow access to a broad spectrum of the community.

If Sydney Chamber Opera is to be sustainable in the longer term, it needs to be properly funded. We need to give young Australian artists opportunities to perform contemporary opera and creative teams the opportunity to realise their imaginative vision. And we need to do so without compromising our artistic integrity of the scale of our ambition.



Sarah Toth and Jessica O'Donoghue in *Victory Over the Sun*
Biennale of Sydney, 2016

HOW YOU CAN HELP

In six years SCO has achieved a remarkable reputation as a vibrant young arts company. It is now imperative that we secure our future and the future of 21st century Australian opera.

We have excellent partnerships in place, including our Carriageworks residency and relationships with major Festivals in Australia and abroad. We need to have the financial confidence to plan our program well in advance in order to continue to attract the best artists, while still keeping our prices low to reach wider audiences.

We will continue the important task of commissioning and presenting new work by Australian composers and librettists, and are currently developing a major commissioning program that will form the bedrock of our activity going forward.

We will continue to be a company where young artists across different disciplines can come and refine their practice in the context of music-led theatre, creating dynamic and stylish productions for our ever-growing audience to absorb and enjoy. The next step we must take to bolster the company for the longer term is to start increasing our funding base.

No arts company can rely solely on government funding. Our company has already attracted attention from around the world, however, good notices alone will not sustain us. To keep on going we urgently require philanthropic support and the advocacy of our committed philanthropists to continue on this extraordinary journey.

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