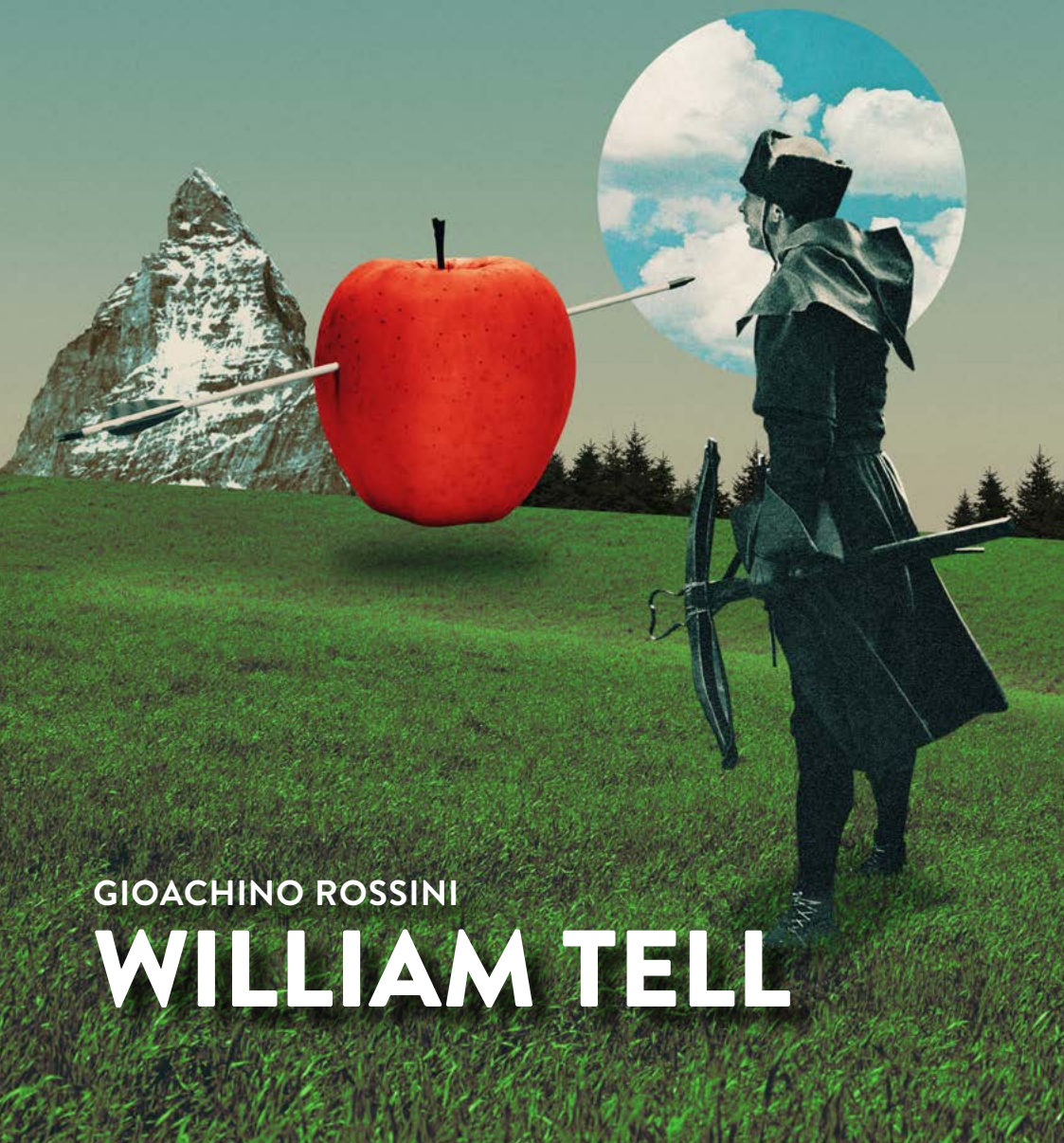


VICTORIAN
OPERA



GIOACHINO ROSSINI

WILLIAM TELL



Armando Noguera
(William Tell)

VICTORIAN OPERA PRESENTS

WILLIAM TELL

Composer **Gioachino Rossini**

Librettists **V.J Etienne de Jouy and H.L.F. Bis**

Conductor **Richard Mills AM**

Director **Rodula Gaitanou**

Set and Lighting Designer **Simon Corder**

Costume Designer **Esther Marie Hayes**

Assistant Director **Meg Deyell**

CAST

Guillaume Tell Armando Noguera	Rodolphe Paul Biencourt
Arnold Melcthal Carlos E. Bárcenas	Ruodi Timothy Reynolds
Walter Furst Jeremy Kleeman	Leuthold Jerzy Kozlowski
Melcthal Teddy Tahu Rhodes	Mathilde Gisela Stille
Jemmy Alexandra Flood	Hedwige Liane Keegan
Gesler Paolo Pecchioli*	

Orchestra Victoria

14, 17 and 19 JULY 2018

Palais Theatre, St Kilda

Original premiere 3 August 1829, Paris Opera
Running Time is 3 hours and 15 minutes, including interval
Sung in French with English surtitles

*Paolo Pecchioli appears with the support of the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music,
University of Melbourne.

PRODUCTION

PRODUCTION TEAM

Production Manager **Eduard Inglés**
Stage Manager **Marina Milankovic**
Deputy Stage Manager **Meg Deyell**
Assistant Stage Manager **Jessica Frost**
Assistant Stage Manager **Luke Hales**
Wardrobe Supervisor **Kate Glenn-Smith**

MUSIC STAFF

Principal Repetiteur **Phoebe Briggs**
Chorus Preparation **Richard Mills, Phoebe Briggs**
Repetiteur **Phillipa Safey**

CHORUS

Soprano

Jordan Auld*, Kirilie Blythman, Jesika Clark*, Rosie Cocklin*, Alexandra Ioan, Millie Leaver*, Rebecca Rashleigh, Diana Simpson, Emily Uhlrich, Nicole Wallace

Mezzo Soprano

Kerrie Bolton, Shakira Dugan, Jessie Eastwood*, Kristina Fekonja*, Hannah Kostros*, Eliza O'Connor*, Ursula Paez, Belinda Paterson, Juel Riggall, Lynlee Williams

Tenor

Jonathon Bam, Paul Batey, Alastair Cooper-Golec, Tomas Dalton, Irving Dekterev, Michael Dimovski, Ernst Ens, Tom Harvey, Jack Jordan*, Douglas Kelly, Zachary McCulloch, Joshua Morton-Galea*, Samuel Rowe*, Nathan Wright*

Bass

Nicholas Christie*, Stephen Coutts, Nick Cowall, Jean-Paul D'Aubbonnett*, David Eckstein, Angus Grant, Jerzy Kozlowski, Callum MacDonald*, Stephen Marsh, Aidan McGartland*, Timothy Newton, Alex Pokryshevsky, Kiran Rajasingam, Raphael Wong

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Professor Jane Davidson, David Barnard (Tutor in Music, Repetiteur, University of Melbourne)

Show Works, Baalight, Norwest

Special Effects **Angelo Sahin**

Armoury **Len Steel**

Surttitle Preparation **Simon Bruckard**

*In association with the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, University of Melbourne

ORCHESTRA

ORCHESTRA VICTORIA

CONCERTMASTER

Seiki Ueno+
Yi Wang*

DEPUTY CONCERTMASTER

Roger Jonsson**
Erica Kennedy*

VIOLIN

Principal 2nd Violin
Monica Naselow*
Associate Principal 1st Violin
Tomomi Brennan
Associate Principal Violin
Rebecca Adler*
Binny Baik
Alyssa Conrau
Rachel Gamer
Matthew Hassall**
Rachael Hunt
Philip Nixon
John Noble
Martin Reddington
Christine Rüter
Lucy Warren
Tony Zhai
Jo Beaumont+
Lynette Rayner+
Ioana Tache+

VIOLA

Section Principal
Paul McMillan**
Jason Bunn*
Catherine Bishop**
Nadine Delbridge
Suying Aw+
Beth Hemming+
Matthew Laing+
Cora Teeuwen+

CELLO

Section Principal
Melissa Chominsky
Associate Principal
Diane Froomes
Sarah Cuming**
Philippa Gardner
Tania Hardy-Smith
Andrea Taylor
Nils Hobiger+

DOUBLE BASS

Section Principal
Stuart Riley
Associate Principal
Kylie Davies*
Matthew Thorne
Christopher Bainbridge+

FLUTE

Section Principal
Lisa-Maree Amos
Associate Principal
Karen Schofield
Principal Piccolo
Rebecca Johnson+

OBOE

Section Principal
Stephen Robinson
Associate Principal
Joshua de Graaf
Principal Cor Anglais
Dafydd Camp

CLARINET

Section Principal
Paul Champion**
Associate Principal
Justin Beere
Principal Bass Clarinet
Andrew Mitchell
Robin Henry+

*Acting

+Guest

**On Leave

*** Courtesy of Opera Australia Orchestra

BASSOON

Section Principal
Lucinda Cran
Associate Principal
Matthew Ockenden***
Principal Contrabassoon
Timothy Murray

HORN

Section Principal
Jasen Moulton
Principal Third Horn
Linda Hewett
Sydney Braunfeld
Rachel Shaw**
Rebecca Luton+

TRUMPET

Section Principal
Mark Fitzpatrick
Associate Principal
Anthony Pope

TROMBONE

Section Principal
Scott Evans
Associate Principal
Tony Gilham
Principal Bass Trombone
Benjamin Anderson**
Charles MacInnes+

TUBA

Principal
Karina Filipi+

TIMPANI

Section Principal
Guy du Blêt

PERCUSSION

Section Principal
Scott Weatherson+
Associate Principal
Stephen Falk+

HARP

Section Principal
Delyth Stafford*

WELCOME

This opera is a challenge for any company, the principal roles are extremely demanding vocally and the orchestra itself almost becomes a character in the opera in its own right. The original version was written for the Paris Opera – it was Rossini’s last opera.

The Paris Opera, the Salle Le Peletier, was the grandest of grand opera houses of 19th century Europe, where taste for unmatched spectacle and ballet was formed by the members of the Parisian Jockey Club. Much of the artistic decision making was made by committee – scenographic and production. Rossini responded when an excited fan gushed that he had just seen *William Tell*: ‘What? All of it?’

These words give us a clue. The composer provided plenty of ballet music and orchestral material to be used at the discretion of the production in hand. The ballet music is superfluous and, although quite pretty, simply holds up the action for a modern audience. My job has been to make a version which comes in at three hours – not five – and has narrative direction, while also including all the great set pieces. Our director, Rodula Gaitanou and I worked to achieve clear storytelling, strong drama and unfussy, lucid staging.

The opera documents the struggle of an oppressed, rural society against a military power which is mechanical and technological. Their connection to the land and their pastoral way of life, with its strong bonds of family and community,

eventually gives them the strength to overcome the foreign tyrant Gesler and achieve new freedom, in which their connection to nature is reaffirmed.

Against this public struggle for liberty, there are the private dilemmas of Arnold and Mathilde, with their star-crossed attraction and also the family dramas of father and son: Melcthal and Arnold, Guillaume and Jemmy, both involving the absolute of death.

This rich narrative finds expression in wonderful music, thrilling ensemble and chorus work, and arias whose brilliance and difficulty are legendary. This is the first production in Australia since 1876. Welcome to the operatic event of 2018.

RICHARD MILLS

Artistic Director and Conductor



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

***William Tell* is Rossini's last opera; written in the style of grand French opera, a piece of monumental dimensions and dramatic impact. This is the story of peaceful rural communities uniting to rise against the occupying forces of an empire which endangers local culture and tradition, freedom of thought and speech, and the possibility of existing in harmony with their natural surroundings.**

Thinking of this western European legend inevitably led me to draw parallels with the future we are creating: a technologically advanced army against unarmed peasants who try to protect nature, their culture, who will struggle to offer the generations that follow a clean, safe, free place to live. I reflect on the conflicts that erupt around the world today, the oppressed communities that stand against tyrannical forces with dignity and courage, led by a passion for freedom. The fight is never glorious, bloodshed will occur, lives will be taken from both sides, people will be forever changed.

Inspiration for the world that we've created scenically came from the piece itself and from contemporary tales of a dystopian future (film and television such as *The Hunger Games* and *The Handmaid's Tale*). Rossini's music depicts the alpine landscape perfectly, the sense of clean air and endless perspective, the rituals and traditions of a peasant community. It also portrays the sense of violence, danger and

oppression, and the passion for the cause, in an extraordinary way. Many amongst our audience will know the famous overture but the real surprise and star of the show for me is the glorious finale: the voices of the people rise to sing a hymn to freedom and the beginning of a new life.

It has been a great pleasure to bring this piece to life for an Australian audience, almost 150 years since it was first staged on these shores.

RODULA GAITANOU

Director



SYNOPSIS

Place. Occupied Switzerland in a dystopian future. The invaders are a technologically superior force intent on the destruction of a simple and wholesome community life in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

ACT ONE

In a pastoral community on the shores of Lake Lucerne, villagers are celebrating a harvest festival centred around veneration of the earth and the blessing of couples and community members by Melcthal, the village elder. Melcthal chides his son Arnold for not having found a wife and notices his deliberate separation from the ceremonies. Later, William Tell is concerned by Arnold's apparently divided soul and provokes his confession of his love for Mathilde, an Austrian Royal Princess, whom he had previously rescued from an avalanche. Tell exhorts him to fight for liberation, in a classic juxtaposition of love versus duty, but as the hunting horns announce the impending approach of Gesler, Arnold slips away to find Mathilde. The village festivities are interrupted by the appearance of Leuthold, who has killed an invading soldier who attempted to abduct his daughter. The cowardly and mean-spirited Ruodi, previously drunk

and badly behaved, refuses to row Leuthold to safety, protesting the tempestuous waters of the lake. Tell readily volunteers and he and Leuthold depart. Almost immediately Gesler and his soldiers arrive and arrest Melcthal, who is summarily executed by Rodolphe, Gesler's henchman, in full view of the fearful community, who have been overrun by the tyrannical, polluting and murderous invading forces.

ACT TWO

Mathilde, alone in the solitude of nature, reflects on the difficulties of her love for Arnold. He joins her and they declare their love by exchanging rings while cognisant of the difficulties surrounding them. They plan for Arnold to achieve military glory. Tell and patriot Walter Furst interrupt this tryst and reveal the heroic and ignominious death of Arnold's father, Melcthal, at the hands of the enemy. Arnold now embraces his duty and joins the Swiss cause wholeheartedly. Tell summons the men of the Swiss Cantons – Unterwald, Schwitz and Uri – who make an oath of fealty to overthrow the tyranny or bravely face death in the attempt.

ACT THREE

Arnold and Mathilde meet and mutually acknowledge the impossibility of their situation. They bid impassioned farewells. Gesler now presides over a celebration of years of imperial rule. Tell and his son Jemmy refuse to venerate his golden bust. Rodolphe recognises Tell as the rebel leader. Gesler, struck by Tell's love for his son and his fame as an archer, improvises a cruel punishment: Tell is to shoot an apple from Jemmy's head. Sustained by Jemmy's filial support, Tell succeeds. Gesler notices a second arrow, which Tell confesses was prepared for him. Gesler orders immediate execution, but Mathilde, as a representative of the throne, orders clemency for the boy Jemmy. Gesler, as a hateful compromise, insists on accompanying Tell – across the stormy waters – to the prison on the other side of the lake. The populace, outraged beyond endurance by the cruelty they have witnessed, erupt in a violent denunciation of Gesler and his occupation in a hate-filled finale. The yoke of imperialism has become intolerable and the subjugated express their defiance heedless of the consequences. Tell assumes the mantle of spiritual leader of a potentially defeated people.

ACT FOUR

Arnold visits his ancestral home and laments the death of his father. He arms his followers and prepares for battle. Mathilde returns Jemmy to his mother Hedwige and joins the Swiss cause, offering comfort and support to the beleaguered women. Leuthold announces the appearance of the boat carrying Tell and Gesler, which has been battered by the stormy waters, and which Tell, now freed from his chains by the cowardly Gesler, steers to safety. They land and Gesler is isolated among the rebels who attack on a pre-arranged signal. Tell kills Gesler. Arnold and his companions complete the liberation of Altdorf, the scene of Gesler's previous perverted celebration, and the soldiers flee in confusion. The community assembles, Arnold remembers his father, and the opera concludes with a canticle to freedom and the beauty of the natural world.



BIOGRAPHIES



RICHARD MILLS

Conductor

Richard is one of Australia's most prolific and internationally recognised composers. He pursues a diverse career as a composer, conductor and artistic director, and has an extensive discography of orchestral works including his own compositions. He has held numerous prestigious posts, and received many scholarships, fellowships and awards including an AM in 1999. He is currently Artistic Director of Victorian Opera, and was Artistic Director of West Australian Opera 1997 – 2012, Director of the Australian Music Project for the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra 2002 – 2008 and Musica Viva's Composer of the Year in 2008. This year Richard conducts Victorian Opera's *William Tell*, *The Capulets and The Montagues*, and *Pelleas and Melisande*.



RODULA GAITANOU

Director

Rodula is an Athens born, Paris trained, London based international opera director. She has created new productions for the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Opera Holland Park, Scottish Opera, UK; GöteborgsOperan, Sweden; Teatro Nacional São Carlos, Portugal; Wexford Festival Opera, Ireland; Teatro Verdi di Trieste, Italy; Xi'an Concert Hall, China; the Greek National Opera and Opera 8 Lab in France amongst others. Rodula trained as a violinist in Athens, studied Musicology at La Sorbonne in Paris, Opera Staging at Paris 8 and physical theatre at the International Theatre School Jacques Lecoq. She is a former Royal Opera House – Covent Garden Jette Parker Young Artist. She was nominated for two Helpmann Awards (Sydney 2013) and an Irish Theatre Award (Dublin 2017).



SIMON CORDER

Set and Lighting Designer

Simon Corder left school in 1978 and joined the circus as a ring boy. In 2017 he was made a Knight of Illumination. He was a winner at the Lighting Design Awards 2006, was nominated for an Irish Times Theatre Award in 2013, and nominated for an Olivier Award in 2004.

Simon's career spans 40 years or so. As a designer he has completed over three hundred projects ranging from grand opera to night zoo lighting, from contemporary dance to avant-garde theatre to light art installations.

His practice embraces lighting for performance, set and production design, light-art, zoo design, event production, lighting for exhibitions, and photography.



ESTHER MARIE HAYES

Costume Designer

Esther Marie Hayes graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts in 2006 with a BA of Dramatic Art. For Victorian Opera, Esther has designed costumes for *Nixon in China*, *Midnight Son*, and *The Baroque Triple Bill*.

Other costume credits include *Macbeth*, *Double Indemnity*, *The Beast*, *Other Desert Cities*, *The Heretic*, *Hamlet*, *All About My Mother*, *Richard III*, *Rockabye* (Melbourne Theatre Company); *Curtains* (The Production Company). As the Sisters Hayes, a sibling artist group, she has designed set and costume for *Going Down*, *Antigone*, *Walking into the Bigness* and *Blood Wedding* (Malthouse Theatre).



ARMANDO NOGUERA

Guillaume Tell

Born in Argentina, Armando Noguera has sung on the most beautiful stages: Paris Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris Opéra Comique, La Monnaie in Brussels, La Fenice, Accademia Santa Cecilia, Glyndebourne Festival.

From Mozart (*Die Zauberflöte*, *Così fan tutte*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*) to Italian (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *La Cenerentola*, *L'Italiana in Algeri*, *L'Elisir d'Amore*, *Simon Boccanegra*, *Falstaff*) and French operas (*Pelléas et Mélisande*, *La Vie parisienne*, *Carmen*), without forgetting *Eugene Onegin*, *Die Fledermaus*, *The Rape of Lucretia*, he approaches an extensive repertoire.

Among his upcoming projects, *Madama Butterfly* in Rouen, *Fantasio* in Montpellier, *Turandot* in Marseille, *Faust* in Nice, *Le Comte Ory* in Metz, but also concerts and recitals.



CARLOS E. BARCENAS

Arnold Melcthal

Born in Cali, Colombia, Carlos studied with Gustavo A. Marquez before moving to Australia in 2007. He holds a Bachelor of Music Performance and a Master of Music (Opera Performance) at The University of Melbourne where he was awarded the Keith G. Chapman Memorial Scholarship. His roles for Victorian Opera include Steuermann (*Der fliegende Holländer*, Wagner), Edgardo (*Lucia di Lammermoor*, Donizetti), Elvino (*La Sonnambula*, Bellini), Sir Bruno (*I Puritani*, Bellini), Flavio (*Norma*, Bellini), Gastone de Letorières (*La Traviata*, Verdi), Prince April (*The Sleeping Beauty*, Respighi) and Ramiro (*La Cenerentola*, Rossini). Carlos received a Green Room Award for his performance of Steuermann in *Der fliegende Holländer*.



JEREMY KLEEMAN

Walter Furst

A graduate of Victorian Opera's Developing Artist Program and of Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, Jeremy has been a Melba Opera Trust Scholar, the recipient of the Dame Heather Begg Award and both Helpmann and Green Room Award nominations. He has performed with Opera Australia, State Opera of South Australia, Sydney Chamber Opera, Pinchgut Opera, Brisbane Baroque, Musica Viva, Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Society, Consort of Melbourne, Melbourne Bach Choir and the Canberra International Music Festival. His 2018 engagements include *The Magic Pudding* for Victorian Opera, the 3MBS Marathon, Collatinus in *The Rape of Lucretia* at Dark Mofo, Nielsen Symphony No.3 with MSO, Aeneas (*Dido and Aeneas*) at MRC and Second Elder (*Susanna*, Handel) for Handel In The Theatre, Canberra.



TEDDY TAHU RHODES

Melcthal

Teddy has performed in major houses throughout the USA and Europe including San Francisco, New York, Hamburg, Paris, Vienna, Welsh National Opera and Scottish Opera Companies.

Roles include: Escamillo (Hamburg, Paris, Munich, Bilbao, Metropolitan Opera, OA), Don Giovanni (OA, WA Opera), Scarpia (WA Opera), Emille de bec/ *South Pacific* (OA), King of Siam/*The King and I* (OA), Méphistophélès (OA, SOSA, WA Opera), Sweeney Todd (Victorian Opera/NZO)

Teddy has been awarded an ARIA, two Helpmann Awards, a Limelight Award, a Green Room Award plus a MO Award.

In 2018 Teddy released his new CD, "I'll Walk Beside You" with ABC Classics.



ALEXANDRA FLOOD

Jemmy

Australian coloratura soprano Alexandra Flood made her professional European opera debut in June 2014 as a young artist at the Salzburg Festival.

Since then Alexandra has performed the roles of Marguerite/*Le Petit Faust* (Hervé, Staatstheater am Gärtnerplatz.), the title role in *The Cunning Little Vixen* (Pacific Opera), Blonde (Vorarlberger Landestheater in Bregenz), *Strictly Gershwin* (Queensland Ballet and Symphony Orchestra), *Violetta/Traviata Remixed* (co-production between Opera Front and the Metropolitan Opera New York's "Met2Go"), *Sepetta/La finta Giardiniera* (Niedersächsische Musiktage), *Norina/Don Pasquale* (Opera Krakow), world premiere of *Miranda/Caliban* (Opera Forward Festival), *Maria/West Side Story* (Bolzano, Italy), *Merry Widow* (Langenlois, Schloss Haindorf) as well as many concerts and European festivals.



PAOLO PECCHIOLI

Gesler

Bass, Paolo Pecchioli started his career more than 25 years ago. Since then, he began an international career and has sung more than 60 leading roles in all the major theatres around the world in: Washington DC, Barcelona, Tokyo, Moscow, Dallas, Pittsburgh, New York, Munich, Dresden, Chicago, Valencia, Soul, Milan, Rome, Venice, Florence, Bari, and Turin. He has worked with numerous conductors including Riccardo Chailly, Zubin Mehta, Riccardo Muti, Riccardo Frizza, Nicola Luisotti, and Carlo Rizzi.

A bel canto repertoire specialist, his roles include *La Cenerentola* (also recorded for Sony Classical) *Semiramide*, *Puritani*, *Barbiere di Siviglia*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, and *Don Giovanni*.

Paolo Pecchioli appears with the support of the University of Melbourne.



PAUL BIENCOURT

Rodolphe

Paul's roles for Victorian Opera include Brighella in *Ariadne Auf Naxos*, Mick in *The Cockatoos*, and all six tenor roles in *Rembrandt's Wife*.

For Melbourne Opera he has appeared as Rodolfo in *La Bohème*, Don Basilio in *The Marriage Of Figaro*, St Brioche in *The Merry Widow*, Remendado in *Carmen*, Ferrando in *Così Fan Tutte*, Goro in *Madam Butterfly* and Pedrillo in *The Abduction From Seraglio*.

Music theatre credits include Noel Weiderberg in the national production of *Shout-The Musical* for Jacobsen Entertainment and eight seasons for The Production Company.

His recent concerts include City of Stonnington's 2017 *Christmas In The Park*.



TIMOTHY REYNOLDS

Ruodi

Melbourne based, Timothy has worked in Europe, the UK and across Australia. In Europe he performed with The Gesualdo Consort Amsterdam, The Bach Akademie Stuttgart with Hans Christoph Rademann, Opera Holland Park, Philharmonischer Chor Esslingen, at the Edinburgh Fringe, and understudied a number of roles at Oper Stuttgart, Germany. In Australia, he has worked with many groups including Victorian Opera, Opera Australia, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra with Simone Young and Sir Andrew Davis, Ludovico's Band, the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, the Melbourne Bach Choir, La Compania, and the Consort of Melbourne. In 2018 Timothy appears with Victorian Opera in multiple productions.



JERZY KOZŁOWSKI

Leuthold

Jerzy has performed in over 60 operas as soloist and chorus member. With Victorian Opera he has performed the role of Christus in Bach's *St John Passion*, Trulove in Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*, bass soloist in Stravinsky's *Les Noces*, toured in *Così fan Tutte*, the Dottore in Verdi's *La traviata* and Arthur in Iain Grandage's *The Riders*, a performance for which he earned a Green Room Award nomination. He has performed in many premieres by Australian composers including works by David Chisholm, Richard Mills, Peter Sculthorpe, Johanna Selleck and Helen Gifford, and has had two song cycles written especially for him by Michael Bertram and Lawrence Whiffin.



GISELA STILLE

Mathilde

Since 2001 Gisela has been a principal at the Royal Opera Copenhagen. Her repertoire includes *Violetta (La traviata)*, *Mími (La bohème)*, *Lulu (Lulu)*, *Desdemona (Otello)*, and much more.

She recently sang Agathe in *Der Freischütz* at the Semperoper Dresden, Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* at the Savonlinna Opera Festival, and Pamina in the spectacular new production of *The Magic Flute* at the Bregenzer Festspiele.

She has received the Leonine Sonning Music Prize, and was the recipient of the Birgit Nilsson Award in 2001. She was also bestowed a Ridder af Dannebrog (Knight of Dannebrog) by Her Majesty the Queen of Denmark.



LIANE KEEGAN

Hedwige

Born in Australia, Liane is a specialist in the works of Mahler and is a regular soloist with MSO in concert and oratorio repertoire. Her extensive career has been divided between leading roles in Australia and Europe. She has performed for Victorian Opera (*The Flying Dutchman*, *The Sleeping Beauty*); SOSA (Erda, First Norn and Waltraute: *Der Ring Des Nibelungen*, Azucena: *Il Trovatore*); OA (Erda: *Der Ring Des Nibelungen*, Ulrica: *Un ballo in Maschera*); ENO (First Norn: *The Twilight of the Gods*); Theater Hagen (Klytämnestra: *Elektra*, Mistress Quickly: *Falstaff*, Leocadjá Begbick: *Aufstieg und fall der Stadt Mahagonny*) and Deutsche Oper Berlin (Anna: *Les Troyens*, Emilia: *Otello*, Marcellina: *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Siegrune: *Die Walküre*).



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Alexandra Flood (Jemmy) and
Carlos E. Bárcenas (Arnold)

IN DEPTH

GUILLAUME TELL FOR OUR TIMES

This masterwork first saw the light of day on 3 August 1829, in Paris, at the Salle Le Peletier, which was the home of the Paris Opera from 1821 until the building burned down in 1873. This theatre was steeped in the traditions of French ballet and saw the premieres of *La Sylphide* (1832), *Giselle* (1841) and *Coppélia* (1870). It was at the centre of the social and artistic life of 19th century Paris and in 1858 was the setting for one of the most famous games in the history of chess – played by American master Paul Morphy and two French aristocrats, the Duke of Brunswick and Count Isouard – during a performance of *Norma*.

This fact tells us a great deal about the place of opera as entertainment for the bourgeoisie and aristocracy of 19th century Paris – and the concept of the opera house as a focus of civic pride and a place for meetings, dinners, socialising and mischief. This range of activities, over and above actually listening to the singers, gives an indication of the listening habits of early 19th century opera goers. We do well to remind ourselves that there was no cinema, one of the loudest noises anyone heard was the steam train and,

compared to the 21st century, people had time on their hands, particularly the middle and upper classes.

These facts, as well as the inheritance of a long and complex social tradition dating back to the 1600s, make the elaborate web of social mores surrounding the opera in 19th century Paris something quite foreign to our contemporary sensibilities. The late 19th century Wagnerian reformation resulted in the notion of the theatre as a ‘temple of ideas’ – rather than an elaborate platform for social interactions which took place in the context of performances, substantially informed by many inherited conventions.

Composers, to survive, had to bow to the fact that, particularly in Paris, these conventions, social and otherwise, reigned supreme. Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* lasted only four performances in 1861 because the ballet was in the first act – members of Parisian Jockey Club arrived after dinner, usually for Act Two and expected to see their favourite ballerinas on duty.

However, some great music was written for this theatre and these conditions including Gounod’s *Faust*, Verdi’s *Don Carlos* and Donizetti’s *Les Martyrs*, and of course *Guillaume Tell*.

Artistic committees made many of the decisions of the Paris Opera in Rossini's time in the areas of scenography, costume and illuminations. And, of course, ballet was essential. *Tell* provides opportunities for visual illusion (alpine scenery, archery tricks, a raging storm) that would satisfy the populace's appetite for scenic spectacle and dance, but which contribute almost nothing to the progress and substance of the drama at hand. While the balletic and scenic effects helped ensure the success of the work with 19th century Parisians, this material for a 21st century public – who have no real expectation of scenic extravagance (we have cinema for that) and who also have no interest in acres of balletic spectacle – is of limited interest.

Interestingly, this Parisian fascination for scenic spectacle persists today, for example at the Folies Bergère. I remember – many years ago – sitting through a pageant of 'the great queens of France' (sic) and the lady in front of me exclaiming to her companion about the scenic drapery, 'O Chérie, les mauves!' ('Oh darling, those purple drapes!')

Well, we have no purple drapes in our *Guillaume Tell* – not even the marks where they might have been – as the

essence of this great work inspires a reverence because of its quality as dramatic music and real seriousness of purpose at its core. Rossini's greatness transcends the prevailing conditions of his age and bequeaths a work which speaks to our times and, I think, times to come.

The concerns of the opera emerge as surprisingly contemporary, finding many parallels in our own world. A rural community who live simply, in harmony with nature, are oppressed by an occupying power who mock this simplicity of life, ban their rituals and do not hesitate to use violence and murder as a means of subjugation. Two father-son relationships are fractured by this force: Melcthal and his son Arnold, and William Tell and his son Jemmy. Melcthal's brutal murder provokes Arnold to join the struggle and Gesler's cruel and sadistic 'trial by apple and arrow' proves to be the last straw for the enslaved populace. Gesler is finally revealed as coward, dies in ignominy and the community rediscovers the majesty of nature and freedom, celebrating in one of the greatest concluding ensembles in opera.

Director Rodula Gaitanou and I have cleaned away the 19th century paraphernalia from the score and

returned to its essence – with strong simple storytelling underpinned by similarly strong musical continuity and careful editing to preserve the important features of Rossini style.

I suppose it's similar to restoring an old master painting: the original vibrancy of the work is re-affirmed, its great musical inventiveness, dramatic power and content emerge to engage with issues that are part of our own immediate world. The enduring capacity of a masterpiece to renew itself and be rediscovered by succeeding generations is completely present in this opera. It started life among the perfumed fantasy and exoticism of French Romantic theatre, it is reborn for us as a document of struggle, a drama of courage, the strength of family, community and humanity expressed through wonderful dramatic music made by a great heart and soul – Rossini.

RICHARD MILLS

Artistic Director and Conductor



Armando Noguera
(William Tell)



Kirilie Blythman (Chorus),
Kiran Rajasingam (Chorus) and
Jeremy Kleeman (Walter Furst)

ABOUT US

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Special thanks to Beata Bowes, Phoebe Briggs, Louise O'Loughlin and Scott Whinfield for their contribution in creating this programme.

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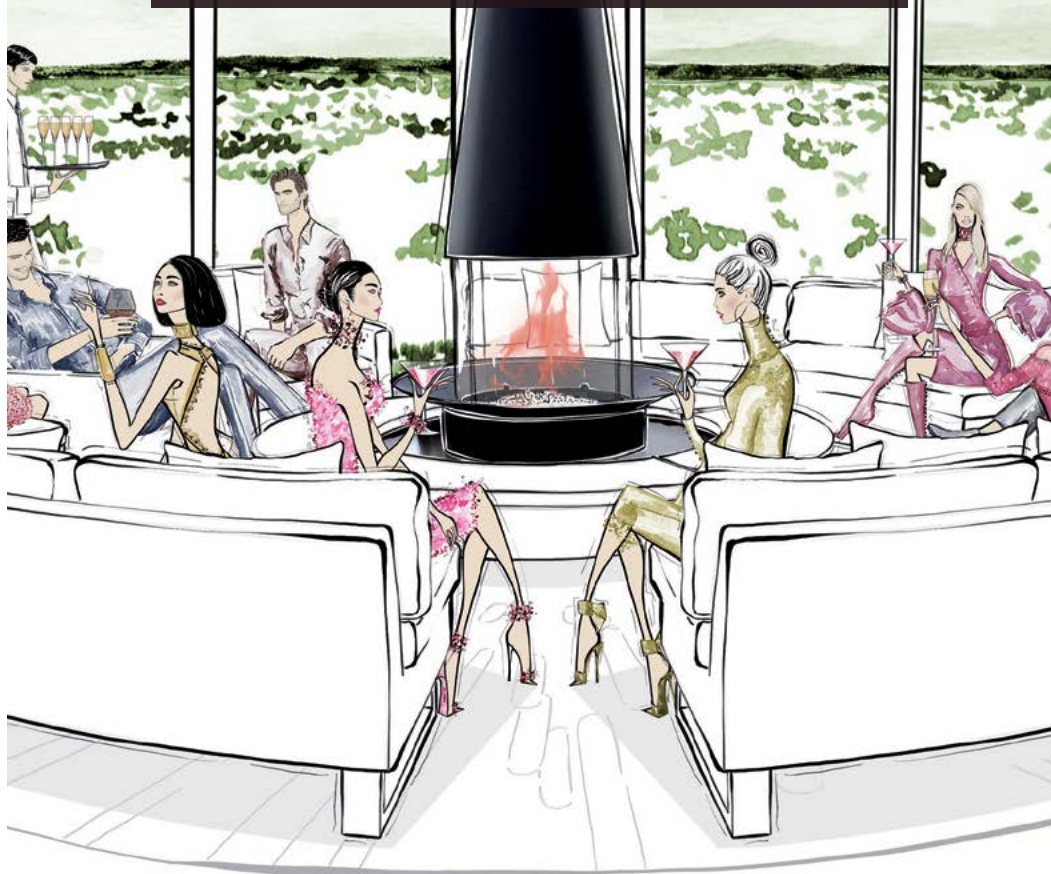
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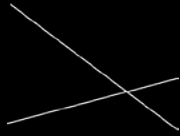
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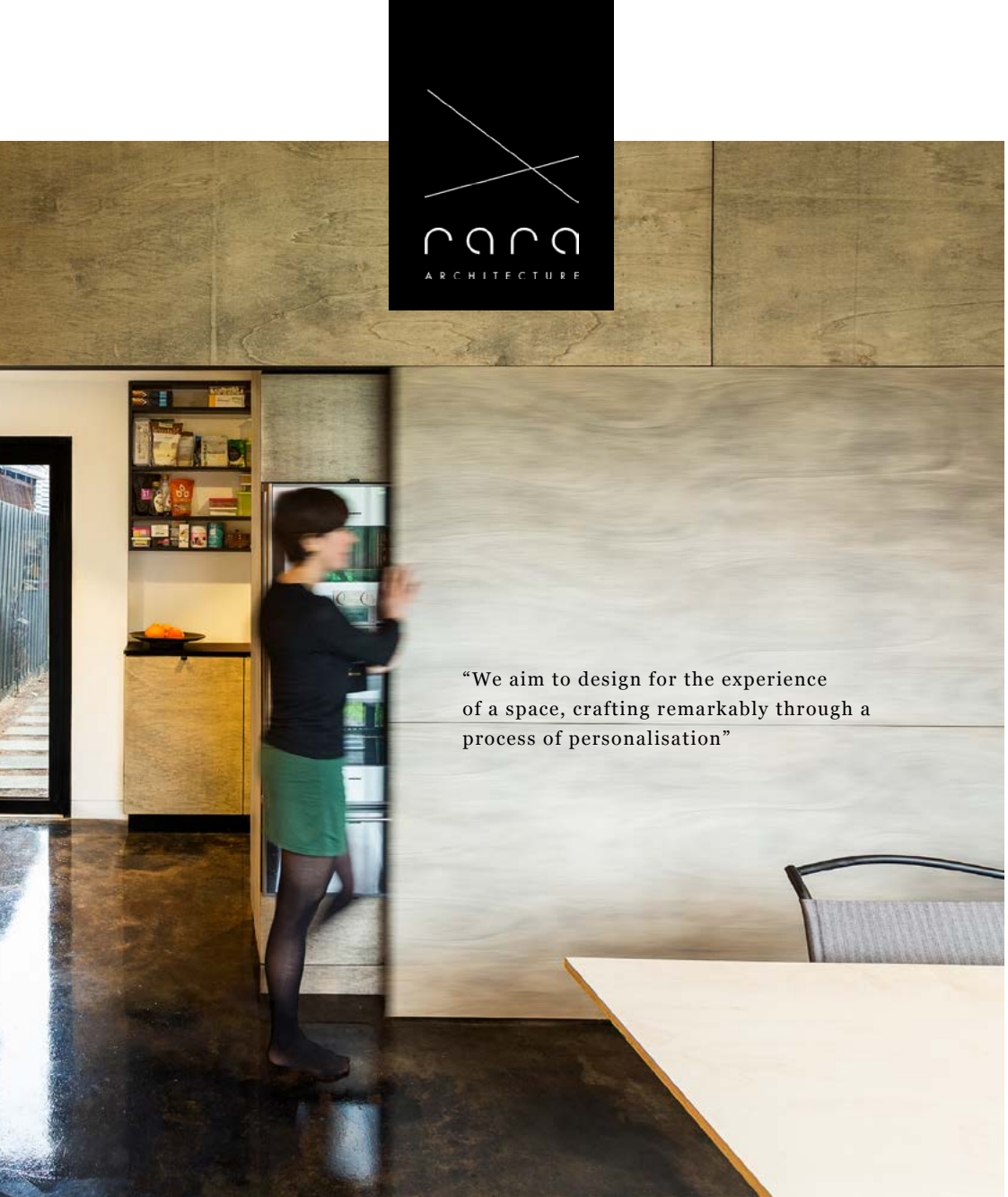
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