

An Epic Opera Event comes to Melbourne

OPERA AUSTRALIA ANNOUNCES *THE MELBOURNE RING CYCLE* FOR 2013

Melbourne will play host to its first ever staging of Wagner's epic, *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*The Ring Cycle*) when Opera Australia brings this gargantuan production to the magnificent State Theatre in 2013.

Opera Australia, in collaboration with Houston Grand Opera, the Victorian Government (through the Victorian Major Events Company), and Maureen and Tony Wheeler, is delighted to announce this long-awaited project. *The Melbourne Ring Cycle* will be a journey through 15 hours of music across four nights in the theatre. The creative team will be led by two of Australia's most celebrated talents - director Neil Armfield and conductor Richard Mills. Three complete cycles will be performed during November/December 2013, in celebration of the 200th anniversary of Richard Wagner's birth.

This journey has been made possible through a leadership donation by Maureen and Tony Wheeler – the largest donation ever received by Opera Australia - with additional direct investment coming from Houston Grand Opera, VMEC and Opera Australia itself. It is hoped that this landmark production will ensure that Melbourne becomes the home of *The Ring Cycle* in Australia for many years to come, attracting a wide interstate and international audience on a triennial basis to the city.

Artistic Director Lyndon Terracini says: "For such an important event, we believe that *The Melbourne Ring Cycle* should have an Australian creative team and feature major international and Australian artists. Consequently it will be directed by one of Australia's finest directors, Neil Armfield and it will be conducted by one of Australia's finest conductors, Richard Mills. *The Ring* requires exceptional talent to reveal its greatness and I'm thrilled that Neil and Richard have accepted this greatest of all challenges."

Principal supporter Maureen Wheeler says: "I became a convert to *The Ring Cycle* some 10 years and have managed to combine my passion for travel and *The Ring* by following it around the world. Besides English, I have seen it performed with surtitles in Chinese, Portuguese and Danish and regardless of the language I have never failed to be moved by this amazing work. I have also been pursuing a dream of having it performed in Melbourne for some years now and finally it is on its way to becoming a reality. I am thrilled that Opera Australia will be performing *The Ring* in Melbourne, 2013, Wagner's bicentenary."

CEO Adrian Collette says: "For some time now Opera Australia has been keen to bring something special to Melbourne, to nurture this important part of our community and demonstrate our commitment to the city. Now with *The Melbourne Ring Cycle*, we have it. A wonderful opportunity to do something in this great city, harnessing the best talent together with the best of Opera Australia. And to bring the eyes of the world to Melbourne, to witness this extraordinary undertaking."

Collaborating with Opera Australia on this momentous production is the renowned Houston Grand Opera. **Anthony Freud, OBE, General Director and CEO of Houston Grand Opera**, noted that the companies have collaborated on several important initiatives in recent seasons, including the acclaimed production of "Peter Grimes" which Houston presents as part of its 2010/11 season.

"It is a thrill to work with Opera Australia on a groundbreaking new production of these important operas, and to contemplate bringing Houston Grand Opera's first-ever 'Ring' to the stage," he says. Houston will present the operas over the course of four seasons beginning in 2014, pending the successful conclusion of its fundraising campaign. "It is particularly gratifying to contemplate a 'Ring' that is brought into being by such a distinguished creative team," said Freud. Director Neil Armfield is well known to Houston audiences as well as to national audiences in the US, due to his work on HGO's ongoing series of productions of the operas of Benjamin Britten and to the success of "Exit the King" on Broadway.

Presenting *The Melbourne Ring Cycle* will be a monumental project, and the rehearsal period will begin a year in advance, to allow all involved adequate time to prepare for this 'Mount Everest' of artistic enterprises. It will feature a tailor-made orchestra to be known as The Opera Australia Ring Orchestra, which will consist of players from Orchestra Victoria, the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra, as well as musicians from other major orchestras from around Australia. *The Ring Cycle* requires an orchestra of epic proportions with more than 100 players, including 6 harps, 14 horns, Steerhorns and a thunder machine!

The production will require 600 hours of rehearsal – 240 hours of this for the orchestra alone. No less than 350 singers, dancers, designers, costume-makers and backstage staff will be part of bringing *The Melbourne Ring Cycle* to fruition, along with up to 100 technicians behind the scene. The spectacular set is expected to take 14 months to build.

The Melbourne Ring Cycle features 34 principal roles. Major roles that are confirmed are: **Susan Bullock** as Brunnhilde, **Juha Uusitalo** as Wotan, **Gary Lehman** as Siegfried and **John Wegner** as Alberich. Further cast details will be announced over the coming months.

"The Arts Centre is the perfect place to present what I know will be an extraordinary and outstanding event," says **Judith Isherwood, the Arts Centre's Chief Executive**. "As the venue partner for the production we are looking forward to establishing Melbourne as the home of *The Ring* in Australia and the Arts Centre's role as the home of *The Ring* in Melbourne."

Arts Minister, Peter Batchelor says: "'The Brumby Labor Government is delighted to be partnering with Opera Australia, Houston Grand Opera and leading Melbourne philanthropists Maureen and Tony Wheeler, to deliver the Melbourne Ring Cycle in 2013. Melbourne's appetite for the arts and our outstanding track record in major events, coupled with our Government's strong and sustained commitment to Victoria's cultural sector, makes Melbourne an ideal city for this production.

"Our ability to stage this production in Melbourne shows the true strength of the arts in Victoria. Opera Australia's 2013 production will generate significant economic benefits for Victoria, creating jobs and boosting our cultural and tourism sector, as well as promoting Melbourne as an exciting cultural destination to a global audience."

Tickets for *The Melbourne Ring Cycle* will go on sale in late 2011

The Creative Team

DIRECTOR – NEIL ARMFIELD



Director **Neil Armfield** needs little introduction to Australian audiences. As artistic director of Belvoir Street Theatre he directed award-winning shows including *Cloudstreet*, *Keating!* and *Gulpilil*. His production of *Billy Budd* won Best Opera in the 2009 Helpmann Awards, and his feature film *Candy* won best screenplay at the AFIs. He was worked with Opera Australia on many occasions, most recently on the new Australian production *Bliss* which had highly acclaimed seasons in Sydney and Melbourne, and which heads to Edinburgh Festival in September.

CONDUCTOR – RICHARD MILLS

Richard Mills is one of Australia's most sought after composers and conductors, which has seen him working with almost all of the nation's major music organisations, including Opera Australia. He is currently Artistic Director of the West Australian Opera, a post held since 1997. He is one of the few Australian composers who has written operas for main stage performances in Australia, and these have met with critical acclaim and a multitude of awards. These are *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* (1996); *Batavia* (2001); and *The Love of the Nightingale* (2007) – the latter will be presented by Opera Australia in Sydney during 2011.



About 'The Ring Cycle'

German composer Richard Wagner composed *The Ring Cycle* as a series of four operas based loosely on stories from Norse mythology. Although renowned for his many other operatic works such as *Tristan und Isolde*, *The Flying Dutchman* and *Tannhäuser*, *The Ring Cycle* became his most famous work and one which he developed over the course of almost thirty years, culminating in 1874. The cycle is intended to be performed consecutively, however as this represents an enormous challenge for singers and musicians, it is not often performed in its entirety. The second of the individual operas - *The Valkyrie* – is the most recognized of these. Performed in full, *The Ring Cycle* is around 15 hours in duration.

The Melbourne Ring Cycle - Philanthropy

The staging of *The Melbourne Ring Cycle* has been made possible through the generosity of Maureen and Tony Wheeler. First through their endowment of The Wheeler Centre, and now through their support for this staging of *The Ring Cycle*, they have demonstrated their commitment to enriching the cultural life of Melbourne. Every person who experiences these performances is also experiencing an act of extraordinary generosity. Through their leadership donation, the Wheelers wish to inspire others to give to the arts and to *The Melbourne Ring Cycle* project in particular, which will require additional philanthropic and sponsorship funds to be raised over the next two year period.

FURTHER MEDIA INFORMATION

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