



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

GOVERNOR'S PERFORMANCE SERIES

OPERA AUSTRALIA

Thursday 29 February 2024

Acknowledgments

The Honourable Alex Chernov, former Governor of Victoria, and **Elizabeth Chernov**

Fiona Allan, CEO and **Jo Davies**, Artistic Director of Opera Australia

Adrian Collette, CEO of Creative Australia

Board Members of Opera Australia

And I would like to acknowledge **Jane Hansen**, Chancellor, and **Professor Duncan Maskell**, Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne

Patrons and Supporters of Opera Australia

Distinguished Guests

I begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the unceded lands on which this House stands – the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people – and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

It's a pleasure to welcome you all here for the latest instalment of the Governor's Performance Series.

This is my second time hosting the Series, here in our historic Ballroom, and I'm delighted to have performers from Opera Australia with us this evening.

Of course, this is not the first time Government House has welcomed renowned opera performers through its doors.

Previous instalments of the Governor's Performance Series have included a concert by the Short Black Opera Company, Australia's only Indigenous opera company, and a rendition of '*Brindisi*' by students of the Victorian College of the Arts.

In earlier times, the House hosted performances of Dame Nellie Melba.

As a child, the Victorian singer performed at a Government House reception hosted by the then Governor, The Most Honourable George Augustus Constantine Phipps, Marquess of Normanby.

Following the performance, Lady Normanby is said to have approached the young singer, advising her that, "*you play brilliantly, but you sing much better...Cultivate your voice, and you will have a great career.*"

Lady Normanby clearly had a good ear, as Dame Melba went on to become one of the most famous singers of the late Victorian era.

In many respects, she was ahead of her time.

Performing on the European circuit made her the richest Australian woman of that time. This was largely thanks to her insistence that 50% of takings for each performance go directly to her.

She sang at continental opera houses and for European royalty before returning to Australia for a concert tour that included several major cities.

It was this tour, which spanned 1902 and 1903, that brought her back to Government House once more, attending the Cup Night dance hosted by the Acting Governor-General, Lord Tennyson.

Today, her portrait hangs in the State Dining Room, alongside the portraits of other impressive Victorian women.

Tonight's performance represents a continuation of the important role opera has played both in the history of this House and in Victoria more broadly.

Since 1956, Opera Australia has promoted the work of Australian artists and committed itself to nurturing the next generation of local talent.

Their productions appear across the country.

The Arts Centre Melbourne is one of two flagship home venues for the company.

Performances at this prestigious house add to Melbourne's cultural scene and generate opportunities for Victorians to experience the live performances that define this State.

The importance of these opportunities is clearly understood by Opera Australia's new Artistic Director, Jo Davies.

Under her guidance, and that of CEO Fiona Allen, the 2024 program has already welcomed Victorians to a free *BMW Opera for All* event in Federation Square.

Future performances will include *Sunset Boulevard*, *Tosca* and *The Puccini Gala Concert*.

Tonight's concert gives you a taste of the talent to be found in an Opera Australia production and I am delighted that it is part of our Performance Series.

I hope you enjoy your time at Government House and thank you to Opera Australia for curating this evening's program.