

**MELBOURNE  
FESTIVAL**

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2015**

Melbourne Festival and Arts Centre Melbourne present

# THE RABBITS

AN OPERA AUSTRALIA AND BARKING GECKO THEATRE COMPANY CO-PRODUCTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH WEST AUSTRALIAN OPERA  
COMMISSIONED BY MELBOURNE FESTIVAL AND PERTH INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL

## LEARNING RESOURCE PACK

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Melbourne Festival, Opera Australia, Arts Centre Melbourne and Reconciliation Australia acknowledges and pays respect to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Ancestors have walked this country and we acknowledge their special and unique contribution to our shared histories, cultures and languages.

We recognise the collective contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians in educating all people across this country.



# CONTENTS

<b>ABOUT THIS RESOURCE</b>	<b>2</b>
THE CREATION OF THE RABBITS	3
COMPOSER'S NOTES	3
<b>RECONCILIATION ACTIVITIES Early Learning/ Primary</b>	<b>4</b>
LESSON 1—KITE SONG	4
LESSON 2—WHERE?	5
LESSON 3—TEA AND WAR	5
<b>RECONCILIATION ACTIVITIES Upper Primary/Early Secondary</b>	<b>6</b>
LESSON 1—MY SKY	6
LESSON 2—TEA AND WAR	7
<b>MUSIC ACTIVITIES Early Learning / Primary</b>	<b>8</b>
LESSON 1—MUSICAL CONVERSATIONS	8
LESSON 2—MUSICAL SOUNDSCAPES	10
<b>MUSIC ACTIVITIES Upper Primary / Lower Secondary</b>	<b>11</b>
LESSON 1—MAKING AN OPERA	11
LESSON 2—SING THE QUESTION	14
<b>LEAD VOCAL SCORE</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>LEAD VOCAL SCORE with Piano Accompaniment</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>ABOUT OPERA</b>	<b>24</b>
OPERA: A HISTORY	24
THE OPERATIC VOICE	24
<b>THE RABBITS</b>	<b>25</b>
CAST	25
CREATIVE TEAM	25
BAND	25
PRODUCTION TEAM	25
CAST	26
ABOUT OPERA AUSTRALIA	29
GOVERNMENT PARTNERS	29
ABOUT RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA	29
ABOUT MELBOURNE FESTIVAL	30
ABOUT BARKING GECKO THEATRE COMPANY	30
ABOUT WEST AUSTRALIAN OPERA	30
ABOUT PERTH FESTIVAL	30
<b>OPERA GLOSSARY</b>	<b>31</b>

# ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

These classroom activities have been written primarily to help primary and early secondary students understand the themes addressed in *The Rabbits* but are also suitable for use in early learning settings. Some activities will be suitable prior to attending a performance and others can be used as follow up activities after the performance. Of course, teachers and educators are encouraged to read the book, *The Rabbits* by John Marsden and Shaun Tan with students in conjunction with the activities. Reconciliation Australia's school and early learning service team prepared the reconciliation activities and Lorraine Milne prepared the music activities.

If possible, talk with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, families or community members about how you might use these activities in your classroom. Due to the sensitive nature of some of the content in *The Rabbits*, setting classroom ground rules with your students before viewing is an important step in creating a safe space and helping develop mutual respect and understanding between the members of your classroom community.

Possible rules could be:

- **Be respectful:** Each person has their own beliefs and values
- **Value diversity:** Each person has their own world views, experiences and opinions.
- **Listen politely:** Each person has a right to contribute without pressure or intimidation
- **Act with honour and courage:** Be brave in sharing experiences, ideas and opinions
- **Appreciate privacy:** Each person has the right to uphold their privacy
- **Act responsibly:** Share feedback with thoughtful consideration and a positive attitude towards others.

Allow adequate time at the end of each viewing session to debrief the content and discussion.

**The notes are all linked to the Australian Curriculum and are divided into two sections:**

1. Reconciliation activities
2. Music activities

**Within these two areas, the activities are grouped for:**

- Early Learning / Primary
- Upper Primary / Lower Secondary

Teachers should feel free to adapt ideas and activities to suit the maturity and ability of students within each grouping.

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM	HISTORY	CIVICS	GEOGRAPHY	DRAMA	MUSIC
F			(ACHGK003)	(ACADRR030) (1,2,3)	(ACAMUR083)
1				(ACADRR030) (1,2,3)	(ACAMUR083)
2				(ACADRR030)(1,2,3)	(ACAMUR083)
3				(ACADRR034) (1,2,3)	(ACAMUR087)
4	(ACHHK080) (1,2,3)		(ACHGK023) (2)	(ACADRR034) (1,2,3)	(ACAMUR087)
5	(ACHHK094) (1,2,3)			(ACADRR038) (1,2,3)	(ACAMUR091)
6	(ACHHK114) (1,2,3)			(ACADRR038) (1,2,3)	(ACAMUR091)
7				(ACADRR046) (All)	
8		(ACHCK066) (4,5)		(ACADRR046) (All)	
9	(ACDSEH020) (5)			(ACADRR053) (All)	(ACAMUR105)
10	(ACDSEH104) (2,4) (ACDSEH143) (1)		(ACHGK072)	(ACADRR053) (All)	(ACAMUR105)

# THE CREATION OF THE RABBITS

## ‘The rabbits came many grandparents ago’

The journey of creating the opera *The Rabbits* has almost been as epic as the journey in the book itself. This extraordinary piece of children’s literature landed in my hands almost 15 years ago and was my first introduction to both the incredible visual world of Shaun Tan and the very powerful and economic writing of John Marsden. I was immediately entranced by the book and spent many hours staring into each picture finding new discoveries that then lead me toward forming the stupid or brilliant—and certainly nothing less than challenging—idea of creating an opera / musical. Those hours turned into weeks, months and, then years before we arrived at where we are today. A sold out premiere season and four Helpmann awards later I am incredibly proud to have *The Rabbits* perform its second season in the Melbourne Festival – our commissioning partner, and later as part of the Sydney Festival 2016. I would also like to take a moment to acknowledge the incredible Sandra Willis, a soul mate on this journey. She has been, without doubt, the driving force in producing this show, indeed bringing *The Rabbits* to a live audience.

Containing universal themes and huge transformations of both landscape and characters, the epic story of *The Rabbits* perfectly lends itself to the artistic discipline of opera. Whilst at the artistic helm of Barking Gecko I have always been committed to pushing the boundaries of theatre for young audiences and what that translates to in creating works that challenges artistic conventions. Similarly Opera Australia, under the dynamic artistic direction of Lyndon Terracini, is expanding its reach by engaging with and developing new audiences of opera by producing works that excite and inspire young people. The synergies and visions of the two companies seemed a perfect fit.

Though aspects of the book make the story particularly pertinent to Australia, Marsden’s metaphorical text and Tan’s highly constructed universe are easily relatable to any study of colonial history. The story provides clear and unsentimental empathy with indigenous cultures and presents a powerful study of a people and a land overwhelmed. To achieve the universality of the themes laid out in this work Rachael Maza has been instrumental in guiding the team through the respect and sensitivity that is fundamental to such a work, and we thank her enormously for sharing her time, stories and wisdom. I would also like to acknowledge Reconciliation Australia for their invaluable input.

*The Rabbits* boasts a team of Australia’s finest pedigreed artists boasting a string of awards that has lead them all to international recognition. When Lyndon first introduced the concept of Kate Miller-Heidke composing the work, I found it to be an inspired connection. I had known of Kate having heard several of her albums and having witnessed her performance in *Jerry Springer the Opera*. Miller-Heidke is a trained soprano who happens to sing pop music, a songwriter who can marry drama and the high technique of opera to a butterfly sweetness in what I have coined, ‘indie op’,—and she is funny! Alongside Kate we added to the musical mix the very genius and generous ‘collaborator of all collaborators’ Mr Iain Grandage. Bringing them both together with Lally Katz, one of Australia’s most prolific and respected, if unclassifiable, young playwrights, and we have a work that has cleverly weaved the strangeness and unhinged surrealism of the world of *The Rabbits* through the libretto. With Gabriela Tylesova’s extraordinary set and costume design we completed the team – she brought to *The Rabbits* a riot of colour, exquisite detail and imagination, and has brilliantly honoured the haunting mythological landscape of Shaun Tan’s world.

I strongly believe that our epic storytelling of Marsden/Tan’s *The Rabbits* coupled with the mixed art form of opera and musical theatre will enable rich discussion, promote cultural awareness, be richly entertaining, and introduce a whole new generation of audiences to the world of musical story telling. We hope you are immersed in and enjoy this thoroughly new and exciting imaginary world.

**JOHN SHEEDY**  
Director & Adaptor  
*The Rabbits*

# COMPOSER’S NOTES

When I was first approached to write music for *The Rabbits*, I read the book and felt very confused. ‘But it doesn’t have a plot (in the traditional sense)!’ I said to John Sheedy on the phone. ‘It doesn’t have characters!’

After chatting with John, it became apparent that he has a radical and fearless approach to storytelling. It wasn’t going to be a traditional linear ‘opera’; it was going to be an opera/musical/song cycle/weird pop concert/puppet show/art-play.

Lyndon Terracini, who was instrumental from the start, emphasised a really fun sense of experimentation throughout the process. At no point was there an expectation that *The Rabbits* would fit the rules of traditional ‘opera’.

This new hybrid beast appealed to me a great deal, as my musical background is a bit of a mash-up—I studied classical voice and have performed in operas, but my main career has been in pop music as a singer-songwriter. Musically, this concept gave me great creative freedom.

As the process went along the musical language started to crystallise into a kind of triangle—the low, loud, slightly Gilbert and Sullivan-esque Rabbits; the more naturalistic, defiant, poppy Marsupials and the alien Bird. There’s a layer of sinister humour and strangeness over the whole lot.

Certain parts were added and modified after we chose our magnificent cast, all of whom have distinctive voices and talents. Although the story is about a fight between two groups, it was important to us that we get a sense of each individual.

Special mention must go to Kanen Breen who completely changed voice type for this role, and now has a potential new career as a counter tenor.

Iain Grandage’s masterful arrangements, golden suggestions and between-scene music helped this process enormously. This is the first time I have composed for the theatre, and I have learned so much from Iain (at least I hope I have)—he is the most sensitive, brilliant collaborator imaginable.

Also, Lally Katz’s sparkling libretto was a joy to work with. Her words have such innate character and colour that it often felt like the songs were writing themselves.

**KATE MILLER-HEIDKE**  
Composer and Bird  
*The Rabbits*

## SUPPORT FOR THE RABBITS

This project is assisted by the Australian Government’s Major Festivals Initiative, managed by the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, in association with the Confederation of Australian International Arts Festivals, Perth International Arts Festival, and Melbourne Festival; and the Western Australian Government through the Department of Culture and the Arts.

An Opera Australia and Barking Gecko Theatre Company co-production. In association with West Australian Opera. Commissioned by Melbourne Festival and Perth International Arts Festival.

The book was first published in Australia by Lothian Books.

The opera is produced by arrangement with Hachette Australia Pty Ltd.

This Education Resource was created by Reconciliation Australia, in association with Opera Australia.

# RECONCILIATION ACTIVITIES

## EARLY LEARNING/ PRIMARY

### LESSON 1—KITE SONG

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A major influence on contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' lives, was the systematic removal of children, from their families, that occurred from the late 1800s to the 1970s. The children who were removed, by past Australian Federal, State and Territory government agencies, and church missions, from their families are known as the Stolen Generation.

#### RESOURCES NEEDED

Archie Roach's song, *Took The Children Away* from the album *Charcoal Lane* (1992)

<https://itunes.apple.com/au/album/took-the-children-away/id213585838?i=213585983>

Roach, A. (2009). *Took the children away*. Camberwell East, Vic.: One Day Hill.

<http://www.bookdepository.com/Took-Children-Away-Archie-Roach/9780980564341>

Briggs, Gurrumul & Dewayne Everett Smith's song, *The Children Came Back*

<https://itunes.apple.com/au/album/the-children-came-back/id1011074221?i=1011074526>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-wMbFntrTo>

(Extension)

Saffioti, T., & MacDonald, N. (2011). *Stolen girl*. Broome, W.A.: Magabala Books.

<https://www.magabala.com/books/younger-readers/stolen-girl.html>

#### PRE-LESSON DISCUSSION

After reading and listening to Archie Roach's *Took The Children Away*, explore with children the feeling of the song/words of the story. The ideas within the song and book, and your cohorts' ability to vocalise their interpretation, can help shape the level of scaffolding they may need in engaging with the emotional climax of *The Rabbits*.

Questions you might ask your students:

- What is *Took The Children Away* about?
- How does the song make you feel?
- Why do you think the children were taken away?

#### LESSON ACTIVITIES

Have children bring a meaningful toy to school (this should be limited to 'soft' toys or comforters). The children can then be encouraged to share with the group why the toy is meaningful/where it comes from/why they love it etc. The group can then talk about the feelings involved in having those toys taken and hidden. How would the children feel if their toy was taken for a minute, an hour, a day... This extension of time can be enacted, with student consent, and discussion about the feelings the children experience help scaffold the students in their understandings of loss. Although quite abstract, have the children imagine what they would feel if they could never see their toy again.

Explain that this is what happens in the story, that the marsupials are faced with the concept of never getting to see their babies again, and that this is also what happened to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

This could be extended by including a reading and exploration of the themes in *Stolen Girl*—<https://www.magabala.com/books/younger-readers/stolen-girl.html>. Students could also write a letter to their lost toy, telling the toy how they feel.

#### POST LESSON DISCUSSION

Scaffolding children and encouraging a safe learning environment may include a debrief discussion looking at the moral and ethical repercussions of the Stolen Generations. This may take the shape of a writing task, or art task, where children create a piece in response to their feelings about the content in the activity/media.

Children could be shown the Briggs and Gurrumul song; *The Children Came Back*.

<https://itunes.apple.com/au/album/the-children-came-back/id1011074221?i=1011074526>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-wMbFntrTo>

This is a musical response, covering the positive contemporary contributions made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and is underpinned by the positive message of *The children came back*, contrasting with Archie Roach's *They took the children away*. In fact, the final chorus of Archie Roach's song hints at this healing, as he sings "*The children came back, yes, I came back...*"

## LESSON 2—WHERE?

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A major focus of the climax of the story is the hopelessness and futility of the marsupials' resistance to the rabbits' domination. The book, and the opera both ask questions about the future of marsupial and rabbit relationships, speaking to the key theme of reconciliation. The parallels between the fictional setting of the Rabbits and contemporary Australian society allows for *The Rabbits* to serve as an important and powerful resource in exploring reconciliation in a contemporary Australian setting, especially with young children.

### RESOURCES NEEDED

Marsden, J., & Tan, S. (2014). *The Rabbits*. Sydney, NSW: Hachette Australia Pty.

<http://www.bookdepository.com/Rabbits-Shaun-Tan/9780734411365>

'Where' from *The Rabbits*, performed by Kate Miller-Heidke

<https://youtu.be/ZL7v4YFowSE>

### PRE-LESSON DISCUSSION

The story never identifies the place in which the events take place.

**Drawing on the characters and visual cues in the story where might the story be set? Why?**

Have a look at the characters in the book. What kind of creatures are these? Do they look like any creatures you have seen before? Research what animals the characters might be, and decide as a class.

### LESSON ACTIVITIES

Provide students with an image of a rabbit and an image of a marsupial from the opera. In groups students discuss the following questions.

- Why do you think they have chosen these animals?
- Look closely at the uniform the rabbits are wearing, have you seen outfits like these before? What kinds of people wear these uniforms?
- If you had to choose two different animals for the play? What would they be?

Draw and label them, providing reasons for your decisions.

**Children are divided into Marsupial and Rabbit groups.**

Their goal is to, informed by the opera, and teacher/educator support, embody their roles, and answer as a Rabbit or Marsupial.

The educator, or another child, is nominated as the bird, and their responsibility is to move about the room and ask the two groups:

"How will you save us?"

This gives students an opportunity to provide their thoughts on how the Rabbits and Marsupials might reconcile. This can then be published by the class and educator as a book, and the ideas can then be explored in more depth, focusing on reconciliation in Australia.

### POST LESSON DISCUSSION

The ideas of reconciliation presented at the conclusion of the book and opera, as well as the question posed by Bird in the song, "Where", suggest that someone must save the marsupials from the rabbits, but the visual literacy of the last scene of the book and opera, in which a rabbit and marsupial are both present, and looking at the reflected stars, might suggest that the onus for reconciliation is on both parties, rather than one or the other. This is a message echoed by the work of many organisations, Reconciliation Australia included, in which Indigenous and Non-Indigenous peoples alike, are encouraged to work together toward a mutually beneficial, respectful and reconciled relationship for the good of the country.

## LESSON 3—TEA AND WAR

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The major conflict with *The Rabbits* narrative is the violence that is perpetrated on the marsupials (both physically and culturally) by the titular Rabbits. This violence sees the death and incarceration of many marsupials, and comments on the parallel violence perpetrated on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by colonising forces, and the subsequent culture within Australian society.

Although there were many instances of resistance and violence perpetrated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, against colonising forces, these attempts were often met with fierce and deadly repercussions.

### RESOURCES NEEDED

Marsden, J., & Tan, S. (2014). *The Rabbits*. Sydney, NSW: Hachette Australia Pty.

<http://www.bookdepository.com/Rabbits-Shaun-Tan/9780734411365>

Baker, H. (2014, April 29). Grand Slam Poetry Champion | Harry Baker | TEDxExeter. Retrieved August 11, 2015, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxGWGohlXiw&feature=youtu.be&t=4m32s>

### PRE LESSON DISCUSSION

**Drawing on the visual literacy of the opera, and the artwork of Shaun Tan, to be found in book, what are the results of the 'fights' that are described in the story?**

**Who do you think wins many of the 'fights'? Why do you suppose this?**

This could be an opportunity to make the connection between these fictional battles, between marsupial and rabbit parties, and the ongoing social and political conflicts that are being engaged in daily, by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The content in the story directly relates to the physical violence that was prevalent during colonisation, however the enduring commentary on the social and political landscapes of Australia is presented in a way that should support your engagement with this content, within your work with young children.

### LESSON ACTIVITIES

**View the presentation by poet, Harry Baker, at TEDx Exeter.**

He explains the format of slam poetry and then performs his poem, Paper People. Slam poetry is based on a competitive form of poetry, and does not adhere to strict rules regarding rhyme, form or genre.

<https://youtu.be/cxGWGohlXiw?t=4m14s>

**Divide groups of students into Rabbit and Marsupial groups.**

Drawing on examples of slam poetry (to be researched by students), write a poem from either POV of the Rabbits, or Marsupials, to be delivered to the class about the themes, narrative and emotion present in *The Rabbits*. These poems can then be delivered to the class as verbal battles..

**Possible themes:**

Dispossession	Drugs	Loss
Racism	Resistance	Rabbits
Colonisation	Culture	War
Violence	Environment	Culture

### POST LESSON DISCUSSION

The verbal competition of the poetry slam is, at it's basic level, a form of verbal violence. The ideas and concepts that the students explore in their poems are all related directly to the ongoing issues that face Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and indeed other First Nations peoples around the world.

Students can be supported in their understandings that, with their peers support, their lacking connection with the content above begins to matter somewhat less. In the same way that established (or adult) authors such as John Marsden, address the plight of Indigenous peoples they, too, can explore issues with language, and literacy, with which they only have a rudimentary understanding of. This can then tie into developing understandings of empathy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the issues of reconciliation.

# RECONCILIATION ACTIVITIES

## UPPER PRIMARY/EARLY SECONDARY

### LESSON 1—MY SKY

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

*The Rabbits* provides a means through which children and young people can begin to understand the more political side of non-Indigenous peoples' relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In this case, the song *My Sky*, relates the distance that the dominant, Eurocentric culture of Australia can have from understanding and empathising with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who continue to struggle with the repercussions of Australia's colonial history.

The character of Bird sings of her disconnect from the marsupials, that she cannot feel their pain, nor understand their plight. It is not until later in the opera, once Bird has witnessed the 'war' between the marsupials and the rabbits, and the removal of the marsupials' children, that she begins to understand, and desire reconciliation between the rabbits and marsupials.

#### RESOURCES NEEDED

Keating, P. (1992, December 10). Redfern Park Speech. Launch of 1993 International Year of Indigenous People. Lecture conducted from , Sydney.—<http://www.abc.net.au/archives/80days/stories/2012/01/19/3415316.htm>

Reconciliation Australia's Fact Sheet on the '67 referendum

Rudd, K. (2008, February 13). Apology to the Stolen Generations. The opening of Australian parliament. Lecture conducted from , Canberra. —[http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/special\\_topics/the\\_apology/](http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/special_topics/the_apology/)

The Northern Territory Intervention

The Recognise Campaign

#### PRE LESSON DISCUSSION

From this distance, I don't cry. I don't have to feel for you.—Bird

The quote, found above, speaks of Bird's attitude toward the Marsupials plight after the Rabbits have created their utopia, and irrevocably changed the landscape of the Marsupials home.

**What might this statement be? If Bird is a representative of a group, or people, as we understand the Rabbits and Marsupials are, who might she be representing?**

The attitudes of the general Australian population are influenced by a myriad of things. These influences range from family cultures/histories to personal experiences. When it comes to attitudes toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, a huge influence exists in the ways that Indigenous Australians are depicted in media. A large part of media representation ties in with political commentary, and political messages being broadcast, and made accessible at any moment of the day.

There are key moments in the political history of Australia, during which the general public have reached a point where, like Bird, in the opera, they ask themselves about their understandings of, and empathy for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Bird fails to see her connection with the marsupials, and makes this clear in her message. What might your message be? What do you think about reconciliation?

#### LESSON ACTIVITIES

In 1992, Prime Minister Paul Keating acknowledged the attitudes of the broader Australian society, marking the historic 'ignorance' that had marked intercultural relations up until 1992.

*"And if we have a sense of justice, as well as common sense, we will forge a new partnership."*

*As I said, it might help us if we non-Aboriginal Australians imagined ourselves dispossessed of the land we had lived on for fifty thousand years – and then imagined ourselves told that it had never been ours.*

*Imagine if ours was the oldest culture in the world and we were told that it was worthless.*

*Imagine if we had resisted this settlement, suffered and died in the defence of our land, and then we were told in history books that we had given up without a fight.*

*Imagine if non-Aboriginal Australians had served their country in peace and war and were then ignored in history books.*

*Imagine if our feats on sporting fields had inspired admiration and patriotism and yet did nothing to diminish prejudice.*

*Imagine if our spiritual life was denied and ridiculed.*

*Imagine if we had suffered the injustice and then were blamed for it.*

*It seems to me that if we can imagine the injustice we can imagine its opposite."*

**Have students write a speech on the topic of reconciliation, allowing students to do their own research on the topic.**

Moments in Australian history that might inform these speeches might include:

- Paul Keating's 1992 Redfern Address
- Kevin Rudd's Apology to the Stolen Generations
- The Recognise Campaign
- The Northern Territory Intervention
- The 1967 Referendum

#### POST LESSON DISCUSSION

The power of words, and especially the words of people committed to a cause, is undeniable. Bird, in the opera, may speak to the apathy of general society, but towards the end of the opera she begins to empathise with the marsupials. This empathy culminates in the question: Who will save us, from the Rabbits?, during the song "Where". Bird begins to understand the connectedness of her situation, to that of the marsupials. This is the beginnings of reconciliation between Bird, the marsupials, and if the scene at the close of the opera is a sign, hopefully the rabbits, as well.



# LESSON 2—TEA AND WAR

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The major conflict with *The Rabbits* narrative is the violence that is perpetrated on the marsupials (both physically and culturally) by the titular Rabbits. This violence sees the death and incarceration of many marsupials, and comments on the parallel violence perpetrated on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by colonising forces, and the subsequent culture within Australian society.

Although there were many instances of resistance and violence perpetrated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, against colonising forces, these attempts were often met with fierce and deadly repercussions.

## RESOURCES NEEDED

Lowe, D. (1994). *Forgotten Rebels: Black Australians Who Fought Back*. Retrieved August 11, 2015, from [www.kooriweb.org/foley/resources/pdfs/127.pdf](http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/resources/pdfs/127.pdf)

Baker, H. (2014, April 29). Grand Slam Poetry Champion | Harry Baker | TEDxExeter. Retrieved August 11, 2015, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxGWGohlXiw&feature=youtu.be&t=4m32s>

Jim Henson vs Stan Lee. Epic Rap Battles of History. Season 4. (2015, August 3). Retrieved August 11, 2015, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXBJZ1NXFU>

Teacher OWNS Student—Rap Battle. (2014, November 14). Retrieved August 11, 2015, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9IW5ve1R-U>

Sir Isaac Newton vs Bill Nye. Epic Rap Battles of History Season 3. (2014, June 16). Retrieved August 11, 2015, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yis7GzIXNM>

## PRE LESSON DISCUSSION

**Drawing on the visual literacy of the opera, and the artwork of Shaun Tan, to be found in book, what are the results of the ‘fights’ that are described in the story?**

**Who do you think wins many of the ‘fights’? Why do you suppose this?**

This could be an opportunity to make the connection between these fictional battles, between marsupial and rabbit parties, and the ongoing social and political conflicts that are being engaged in daily, by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The content in the story directly relates to the physical violence that was prevalent during colonisation, however the enduring commentary on the social and political landscapes of Australia is presented in a way that should support your engagement with this content, within your work with young children.

## LESSON ACTIVITIES—RESISTANCE

Using David Lowe’s manuscript, *Forgotten Rebels: Black Australians Who Fought Back* as a starting point, read about and research Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resistance fighters and activists. There are many examples of well-documented accounts of resistance efforts, and key figures who lead Aboriginal resistance groups and families.

Several stories that are shared in Lowe’s manuscript are those of the resistance members:

- Jandamurra (Bunuba)
- The Kalkadoon people
- Windradyne (Wiradjuri)
- Yagan (Noongar)

**Choosing the stories of any of these, or other resistance fighters you can find out about, write a journal entry focussed on a different element of the story from the perspective of their chosen resistance fighter.**

This will require that you research the area in which the warrior lived, and the conflicts in which they were involved.

- Make sure you explore the motivation of Aboriginal resistance fighters in order to provide students’ with some contextual information about why colonisation was resisted.
- Alternatively, write a journal entry on a different element of the story from the perspective of their chosen resistance fighter. They will then follow this up with a period newspaper article, showing the colonial perspective on the conflicts.
- Make sure you explore the motivation of Aboriginal resistance fighters in order to provide students’ with some contextual information about why colonisation was resisted.

## LESSON ACTIVITIES—TO BATTLE!

**View the presentation by poet, Harry Baker, at TEDx Exeter.**

He explains the format of slam poetry and then performs his poem, Paper People. Slam poetry is based on a competitive form of poetry, and does not adhere to strict rules regarding rhyme, form or genre.

<https://youtu.be/cxGWGohlXiw?t=4m14s>

**Divide groups of students into Rabbit and Marsupial groups.**

Drawing on examples of slam poetry (to be researched by students), write a poem from either POV of the Rabbits, or Marsupials, to be delivered to the class about the themes, narrative and emotion present in *The Rabbits*. These poems can then be delivered to the class as verbal battles, where Marsupials may finally have a chance to win.

**Themes your poems might speak to are:**

Dispossession	Drugs	Loss
Racism	Resistance	Rabbits
Colonisation	Culture	War
Violence	Environment	Culture

Alternatively, and perhaps for an older audience, Rabbits and Marsupials can change the structure of the battle, and focus on each other, and their relationship, as the content of their poems. This draws on the history of hip-hop ‘rap battles’, where participants usually improvise poems in response to their opponents’ and typically take on elements of intimidation and or insult.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9IW5ve1R-U>

The above video shows a high school boy and his Portuguese language teacher in a rap battle, highlighting the way a battle often takes place. This is also represented in many films, and several YouTube channels host serious, and parody rap battles.

Another example can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yis7GzIXNM>

## POST LESSON DISCUSSION

The motivations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resistance fighters draw on incredibly complex, confronting and culturally challenging concepts. Support your students to show empathy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who lost their homes, their cultures, their families, and in many cases, their lives, during the course of British colonisation of Australia.

This scaffolding and support may include references to the experiences of refugees, whose own homes, cultures and freedoms have been taken by invading forces, keeping in mind that the time and context of the conflicts are unique to all peoples and cultures.

# MUSIC ACTIVITIES

## EARLY LEARNING / PRIMARY

### LESSON 1. MUSICAL CONVERSATIONS

- a. Begin by reading *The Rabbits* to the class; the children follow the illustrations as they listen to the story.
- Get individuals to tell the story in their own words. While the underlying allegory about colonization is important for older students (particularly at Secondary level) to explore in depth, lead the younger ones to talk about their feelings about the story.
  - Focus on parts that made them feel curious or puzzled, scared or angry, sad or hopeful, etc.
- b. Discuss the fact that the great majority of marsupials in the world live in Australia. They are native to this country and include kangaroos, koalas, possums, wombats and bilbys.
- The marsupials depicted in *The Rabbits* are described as "... native numbat-like creatures..." Illustrator Shaun Tan says they are really a hybrid of the numbat, the Thylacine (Tasmanian) tiger and the Papua New Guinea tree wallaby, hence their ability to live in the trees.
  - Help the children learn more about these animals. Numbats, unique Australian marsupials, were once widespread across southern Australia. They are now listed as an endangered species.
  - Then help the children to understand that rabbits are not native to Australia and have done great damage to the landscape. In this way, lead them to realize that the story of *The Rabbits* is set in Australia.
- c. Suggest that the children take on the role of either a Marsupial or a Rabbit. Choose one or two illustrations from the book and get them to act out that part of the story, for example (below right):

*They didn't live in the trees like we did.  
They made their own houses.  
We couldn't understand the way they talked.*

Focus on the kinds of sounds they might "hear" in this illustration by asking questions such as:

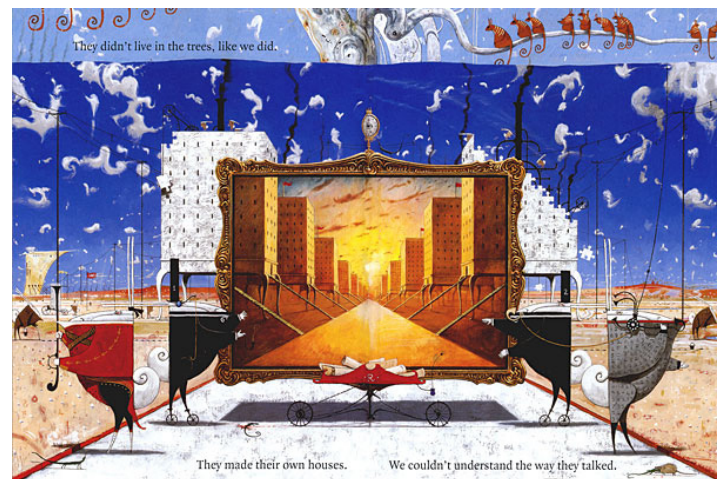
- Where do the marsupials live?
- What sounds would they hear?
- Can you make those sounds using your voices?
- What kind of houses did the rabbits build?
- What will you use to make the sound of building?



A NUMBAT IN THE PERTH ZOO



SHAUN TAN'S "NUMBAT-LIKE CREATURE"



- d. **Working in pairs and using a variety of percussion instruments, the children have a conversation with each other, not with words but through the instruments.** Ask them to make the instruments talk—sometimes happy, sometimes laughing, sometimes cross, sometimes serious, and so on. Do they understand each other? Do they talk at the same time? Do they listen to each other and respond?
- e. **Explain to the children that this special story has been turned into an opera.** Lead them to explore what an opera is by talking about a theatre production they have attended where lots of music, particularly singing, has been involved, for example, *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Lion King*.
- **Focus on the idea that in an opera, the whole story is usually sung—there is very little talking, if any.** However, there is a special piece of music used in opera called a recitative which means that the singers half sing/half speak those lines, not in strict rhythm. Allow children to try this out themselves by having a conversation where they sing rather than speak to each other.
  - **They may like to do this by assuming the character of a marsupial and a rabbit and have a “sung” conversation that relates to a particular page in the book.** For example, the double page showing sheep and cattle with the following text could provide lots of ideas:

*They brought new food and they brought other animals.  
We liked some of the food and we liked some of the animals.  
But some of the food made us sick and some of the animals scared us.*

- f. **Explain that there are 11 characters in the opera—five Marsupials and five Rabbits, plus a special character, Bird, who acts as a narrator, sitting on top of the tree and commenting on the action below.**

The final song in *The Rabbits* is titled *Where?* It is a very moving song and uses the text from the last three pages of the book:

*The land is bare and brown  
And the wind blows empty across the plains  
Where is the rich, dark earth, brown and moist?  
Where is the smell of rain dripping from gum trees?  
Where are the great billabongs alive with long-legged birds?  
Who will save us from the rabbits?*

Re-read this section of the book and then play the following YouTube performance of the song.

<https://youtu.be/ZL7v4YFowSE>

It is a solo performance by the composer, Kate Miller-Heidke accompanied on piano by Iain Grandage, co-composer, arranger and musical director.

It was filmed at Opera Australia during rehearsals for *The Rabbits* and intercuts between Kate to moments in rehearsal and snippets of scenes from the show. These snippets provide the children with a wonderful introduction to all the characters, costuming and style of the staging.



## LESSON 2. MUSICAL SOUNDSCAPES

a. An opera consists of many different types of songs:

- solo songs...
- duets...
- ensemble pieces for 3 or more characters...
- and of course recitative—those moments that are half spoken/half sung.

**But it also contains moments that are purely instrumental:**

- Overture—opening music to set the scene...
- Interludes (or entr'actes)—moments that reinforce a particular mood or link one part of the story to the next...
- Special music to accompany an action on stage.

The overture to the *The Rabbits* is a soundscape titled *Dawn Chorus*. It employs different vocal and instrumental sounds to evoke the dawn as the sun rises over a giant billabong.

This image, *The great billabong*, comes from the inside front and back covers of the book. Show the children the full two-page spread and get them to describe the scene.



Introduce the word “billabong” and tell them that the opera opens in a beautiful healthy billabong just like the one in this illustration.

Get them to imagine a bush setting by a billabong. It is still dark.

Ask what kinds of sounds they might hear in this landscape. As they make suggestions, encourage them to try making those sounds using their voices and any instruments available. Pose questions such as:

Will there be watery sounds? How will you make those?

Are there any “dry” sounds? What are they?

How could you make those?

What kinds of creature noises might you hear?

What kinds of birds are there?

Is there any wind? How do you show that through sound?

Introduce the idea of the sun slowly rising. How will the children interpret that through sound? As it does, and the light increases, the sound of birds and animals gets louder, more tangled in texture. Help them to build this into their sound picture.

Following this, the younger students could draw their own version of Dawn breaking over the billabong.

b. Older students could draw a graphic score of their Dawn Chorus soundscape. Start by dividing the soundscape into three sections and writing descriptive words for each section. For example:

- Pre-dawn. It is still dark. Very soft sounds, rustling, clicking, shimmering.
- Light increases. Some soft bird calls. Soft splashing of water. A light wind rustles the leaves on the trees.
- The sun rises up over the horizon. Many more birds join the chorus. All sorts of creatures appear.

The students then devise graphic shapes to indicate particular sounds. Here are a few possibilities.



A shimmering sound?



A curvy descending sound?



An ascending sound?



Random short “dry” sounds?

The score could also incorporate words to indicate dynamics (soft, get louder) and tempo (very slowly, fast).

A blank template for a full score might look like this:

1. Pre-dawn	2. Light increases	3. The sun rises

The students draw their graphics in the three sections to show what is played, when it is played and how it is played (very softly, getting faster, etc).

Encourage them to experiment with layering sounds—so that Pre-dawn, for example, might consist of a combination of shimmering sounds, low humming sounds, a few random clicks, and so on.

They then play their *Dawn Chorus* soundscape by following the score. They will need to decide how long each section will last—a conductor could be useful here.

They might also like to perform *Dawn Chorus* for the younger children in Preps, Years 1 and 2.

c. Once the children have composed their own *Dawn Chorus*, you could describe what they will hear when they attend the performance.

Ask them to listen out very carefully for all these sounds and talk about it after the event.

*When the opera starts, you will hear some very quiet recorded sounds of the bush. Then a low humming sound is heard as Bird appears at the top of the tree. Using the vocal sound “Oh”, she sings birdcalls, looking around and calling into the increasing light as the sun begins to rise; the orchestra adds soft shimmering sounds.*

*The volume and texture increases as you hear echoes of the birdcalls. A running figure is added on violin increasing the energy again and all voices then join in with Bird, singing loud ascending, sliding (glissando) figures on the syllables Oooo-ah!*

*When the sun has fully risen, the billabong disappears and the tree where the Marsupials live is fully revealed.*



# MUSIC ACTIVITIES

## UPPER PRIMARY/LOWER SECONDARY

### LESSON 1—MAKING AN OPERA

- a. After reading *The Rabbits*, discuss the issues raised in the book. Explain that a team of creative writers, lyricists and composers has turned this book into a one-hour opera...not a traditional opera but one that embraces different styles of music mixing pop feel with “drunken” waltzes and insistent march tunes. The characters—five Marsupials and five Rabbits—have been given names and individual characteristics.
- **The Marsupials**
    - 3 females—Coda, Flinch and Roxie
    - 2 males—2 Stripe and 3 Stripe
  - **The Rabbits**
    - A Scientist
    - A Society Rabbit
    - A Convict
    - A Lieutenant
    - The Captain
    - A special character, **BIRD**, acts as a narrator who comments on the action below.
- b. To give students an idea of what to expect when they attend the performance of *The Rabbits*, use the illustrations and text in the book to “walk” them through some of the main aspects of this opera.
- The **lyrics** pick up bits and pieces of the text from the book. For example, look at the first two pages.



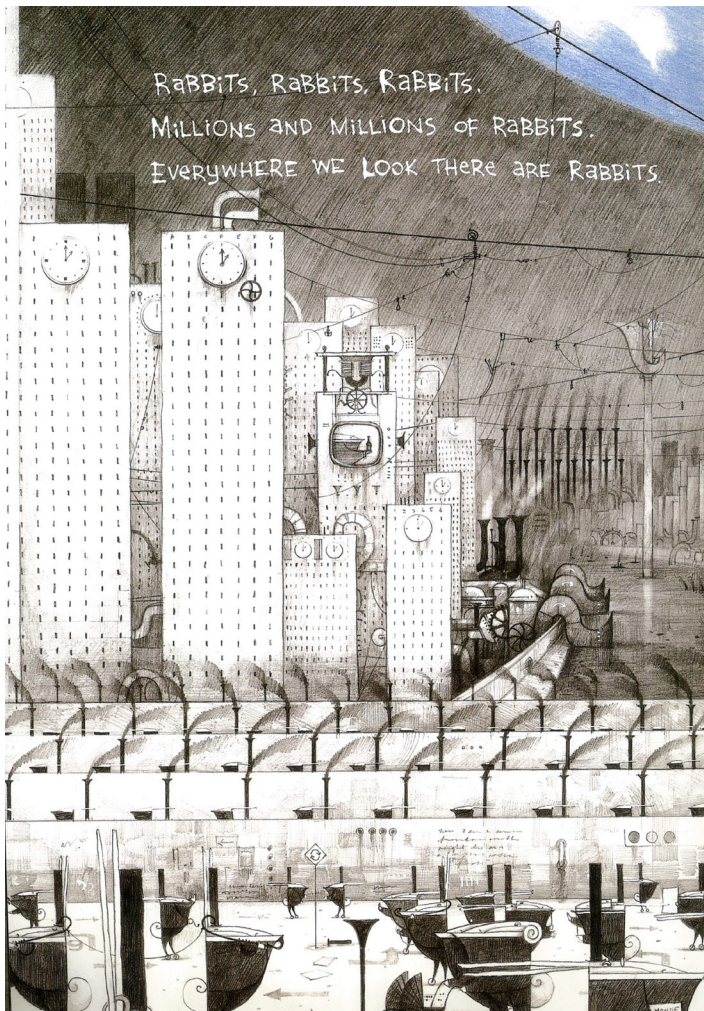
*First Encounter*, the second musical number, begins as a recitative between the Marsupials. As a strange contraption, seen in the top right hand corner of this illustration and driven by two Rabbits comes into view, the Marsupials half sing/half speak (recitative) lines such as:

*What is that?  
I don't know. It's rrrreally weird.  
I'm gonna go down and see if I can catch it.  
No. Stay up here.*

Bird, sitting above them in the tree, comments using a slightly altered version of the text from these two pages. Using the free rhythm of recitative, she sings:

*The Rabbits came many Grandparents ago,  
At first the Marsupials didn't know what to think  
They looked a bit like them.  
And there weren't many of them.  
Some were friendly.*





- The **music** involves a full range of numbers with soundscapes, musical interludes, solo songs, ensemble numbers and recitative (half spoken/half sung usually not in strict rhythm).
- Also, the **lyrics and music** employ a lot of repetition, reflecting the voracious nature of the invaders and the relentless march of time and "progress" as the Rabbits multiply and spread out over the land.

The song which arose from this particular page in the book is titled *Millions of Rabbits* and employs repetition extremely effectively. The idea of the rapid spread of Rabbits as they push aside everything in their way lends itself beautifully to the use of chunky ostinato rhythms and repeated word patterns.

Using the words and illustration as inspiration, younger students could write their own *Millions of Rabbits Rap*. More mature students could experiment with layering ostinato rhythms over a *Millions of Rabbits Rap*. The illustration should give them lots of ideas to use—from the mechanical sounds of the industrial landscape to multiple clocks ticking away.

The ostinato accompaniment might be scored for either non-tuned percussion or piano/guitar riffs. With chordal riffs, it can be most effective to use only two alternating chords.

This example from the score—the first five bars of Verse 1 of *Millions of Rabbits*—shows the use of two alternating chords, a chunky rhythmic ostinato and a very interesting and particular use of repetition of syllables.



- c. Display the illustration—THEY CAME BY WATER. Get the students to suggest ways this particular page could be interpreted through music.

Working in small groups, students compose their own piece to reflect this part of the story. Remind them that there are five Rabbits on board this ship—the captain, a lieutenant, a scientist, a society rabbit and a convict.

They may write an instrumental piece to give the impression of making a journey by sea; they could compose a water soundscape using vocal sounds and other special effects or they might come up with a song for the captain and crew. They might even consider having a go at a recitative.

Each group performs their piece for the rest of the class, explaining why they chose to use particular sounds or techniques.

- d. In *The Rabbits*, this moment has been set as an ensemble piece called Seasick Waltz. It begins with a recitative by the Captain singing about how they have been sailing for months and are very tired and thirsty. But the Empire must grow and he is determined to claim this new land. The Seasick Waltz then takes off in full force and each of the five characters sings their own verse:
- the Captain about how he is in charge, his word is law;
  - the Scientist about wanting to dissect everything he sees and becoming world famous;
  - the Society Rabbit about being drunk on rum and constantly falling over and hurting his backside;
  - the Lieutenant sings in French about how seasick he is;
  - the convict has a tender moment, singing about his dear wife and how he longs to be with her.

At the end of each verse a “seasick” chorus is sung using the lyrics:

*Oh! Oh! Oh! New shores! Oh!*

This chorus gets longer through added repetitions of these lyrics, and more seasick each time until all five characters end up vomiting.

Having discussed and worked through the above ideas, get the students to take particular notice of some of these things during the performance of *The Rabbits*. It will provide a rich opportunity for discussion after the event.

- e. Once students have had a go at interpreting MILLIONS OF RABBITS and THEY CAME BY WATER, consider the possibility of turning part of a favourite book or comic into an opera/music theatre piece in the same way that *The Rabbits* has been adapted to the stage.

Alternatively, they might research an Australian animal or bird on the endangered list, and write a piece based on that creature’s life and situation. This idea provides a perfect opportunity to borrow from *The Rabbits* and end with Who will save us?

Encourage the students to use as many aspects of opera as they can manage, for example:

- Musical interludes are an important part of the stage presentation as they can set the mood, give the impression of time passing or make the transition from one scene to the next.
- Solo songs, Duets and Ensemble pieces (for 3 or more together)
- Recitative – this musical form is particularly useful for carrying the action forward and filling out parts of the story quickly and easily.
- A narrator can also be a useful “tool” to use.

If appropriate and possible, allow students to mount a performance of their ENDANGERED OPERA. It would provide a wonderful opportunity to engage in areas such as staging, design, costume, lighting as well as the literary/musical side.



## LESSON 2—SING THE QUESTION

- a. The final song in the opera—*Where?*—is very moving and concludes by asking the question, Who will save us? The lyrics take the text from the last three pages of the book and weave them through the song.

The following YouTube solo performance by the composer, Kate Miller-Heidke was filmed at Opera Australia during rehearsals for *The Rabbits*. It intercuts between Kate to moments in rehearsal and snippets of scenes from the show. These snippets provide students with a wonderful introduction to all the characters, costuming and style of the staging.

<https://youtu.be/ZL7v4YFowSE>

Distribute copies of the lyrics for students to follow as they listen to her performance accompanied on piano by Iain Grandage, co-composer, arranger and musical director of the show.

In the opera, the three verses are shared between the Marsupials with Bird joining in on the Pre-Chorus. The whole cast—Bird, Marsupials as well as Rabbits—joins in at Chorus 2.

- b. As preparation before attending a performance of the opera, it would be most rewarding for students to learn to sing this song.

For the most part, the melody of *Where?* is within the range of young voices.

However, there are two phrases in the song that are pitched too high for immature voices. The first is the last line of the Pre-Chorus (That time seems so long ago now) and the second is the very last phrase of the song (Who will save us).

These phrases could be intoned over the accompaniment (a la recitative), whispered or sung an octave lower.

Two different scores are attached showing these phrases notated down an octave:

- (i) a three-page vocal lead score with chords;
- (ii) a six-page vocal lead score with piano accompaniment.

- c. When the students are confident in singing the song, they may like to try performing it by dividing the sections between different soloists, duos and the full group just as the cast of *The Rabbits* does.

### WHERE?

**Lyrics:** Lally Katz

**Music:** Kate Miller-Heidke with Iain Grandage

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1. *This land is bare and brown  
And the wind blows empty 'cross the plains  
I have walked these plains for the whole mem'ry of my soul*

2. *And the soul of my mothers  
And the soul of my fathers' fathers  
We have been the life of these plains  
Ghosts on these plains*

Pre-Chorus:

*The wind, once full  
The grass, once green  
There were plants in our hands  
That time seems so long ago now*

Chorus 1:

*Where is the rich, dark earth, brown and moist?  
Where is the smell of rain dripping from gum leaves?*

3. *Ev'rything familiar is gone  
Ev'rything I counted on  
I can't run, I can't swim away from this land*

Chorus 2:

*Where is the rich, dark earth, brown and moist?  
Where is the smell of rain dripping from gum leaves?  
Where are the billabongs?  
The long-legged birds?  
Where are the rivers?  
They used to run clear, now they're eaten by mud.  
Who will save us...from the Rabbits (whispered)*



# LEAD VOCAL SCORE

## Where?

from 'The Rabbits'

Words: Lally Katz with KMH

Music : Kate Miller-Heidke with Iain Grandage

**Gently** (♩ = c. 112)

**A** **VERSE 1**

*p* D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>/A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>/E<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>/A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>/E<sup>b</sup>

8 Now the land is bare and brown And the wind blows em - pty

15 D<sup>b</sup>/G<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> *mp* B<sup>b</sup>m A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>/G<sup>b</sup>

'cross the plains I have walked these plains for the whole

**B** D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>/A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>/E<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>/A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>/E<sup>b</sup>

21 me-m'ry of my soul

**C** **VERSE 2**

D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>/A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>/A<sup>b</sup>

29 And the soul of my mo - thers And the soul of my fat - hers'

36 D<sup>b</sup>/G<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> *mf* B<sup>b</sup>m A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>/G<sup>b</sup>

fa - thers We have been the life of these plains Ghosts on these

**D** D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>/A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>/E<sup>b</sup> **E** **PRE-CHORUS**

D<sup>b</sup>/F G<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>m A<sup>b</sup>/C

plains The wind, once

50  $D^b$  *mf*  $B^b_m$   $B^b_m/A^b$   $G^b$   $G^b$  **F**  $B^b_m$   $B^b_m/A^b$   $G^b$   $A^b/C$

full The grass, once green There were plants \_\_\_\_\_ in our

57  $D^b$   $B^b_m$  *8ve up, but only if possible*  $F_m$   $G^b$  **G**  $E^b_m$  **CHORUS 1**

hands That time \_\_\_\_\_ seems so \_\_\_\_\_ long \_\_\_\_\_ a-go \_\_\_\_\_ now

65  $D^b/F$   $G^b$   $A^b_{sus4}$   $A^b$   $E^b_m$

Where is the rich, dark earth, Brown and moist? \_\_\_\_\_ Where is the

72  $D^b/F$   $G^b$   $A^b_{sus4}$   $A^b$  **H** **INSTR**  $C_m$   $E^b/B^b$

smell of rain drip-ping \_\_\_\_\_ from gum trees?

79  $A^b$   $F_m$   $C_m$  **I**  $D^b$   $A^b/D^b$   $E^b_m$

Ev - 'ry-thing fa - mi-liar \_\_\_\_\_ is gone

87 **J** **VERSE 3**  $D^b$   $D^b/A^b$   $D^b$  *mf*  $B^b_m$   $A^b$

Ev - 'ry-thing I coun - ted on I can't run I can't swim a-

95  $D^b$   $D^b/A^b$   $D^b/G^b$   $D^b$   $D^b$  **K** **CHORUS 2**  $E^b_m$   $D^b/F$   $G^b$

103 way from this land Where is the rich, dark earth,

The Rabbits : Where? : p.2/3

110  $A^b\text{sus}4$   $A^b$   $E^b\text{m}$   $D^b/F$   $G^b$   
 Brown and moist? \_\_\_\_\_ Where is the smell of rain

116  $A^b\text{sus}4$   $A^b\text{sus}4$   $E^b\text{m}$   $D^b/F$   $G^b$   
 drip-ping \_\_\_\_\_ from gum trees? Where are the bil - la - bongs? The

122  $A^b\text{sus}4$   $A^b$  **M**  $C\text{m}$   $E^b/B^b$   $A^b$   
 long - leg-ged birds? \_\_\_\_\_ Where are the ri - vers? They

128  $F\text{m}$   $C\text{m}$   
 used to flow clear now they're ea - ten by mud. \_\_\_\_\_

132  $C\text{m}$  **N**  $B^b\text{ff}$  *8ve up, but only if possible*  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Who \_\_\_\_\_

138  $F\text{m}$  **Rall** *Whispered: "From the Rabbits"*  
 will save \_\_\_\_\_ us \_\_\_\_\_

**O** **Tempo I (Meno)** ( $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 108$ )  
 $D^b5$   $A^b$   $E^b\text{min}7$   $D^b$  **Rall**  $E^b\text{add}4$

The Rabbits : Where? : p.3/3

# LEAD VOCAL SCORE WITH PIANO ACCOMPANIMENT

## Where?

from 'The Rabbits'

Words: Lally Katz with KMH

Music : Kate Miller-Heidke with Iain Grandage

Gently (♩ = c. 112)

Sop (KMH)

Piano

*pp*

*Sempre Ped.*

8 *p* **A** VERSE 1

Now the land is bare and brown And the wind blows

14 *mp*

em - pty 'cross the plains I have walked these plains for the



**B**

20

whole me-m'ry of my soul

*mp*

**C** VERSE 2

28

And the soul of my mothers And the soul of my

*p*

35

fat - hers' fa - thers We have been the life of these plains

*mf*

**D****E** PRE-CHORUS

42

Ghosts on these plains The wind,

*mp*

48 *mf* F 3

once full The grass, once green There were plants

G<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>m A<sup>b</sup>/C D<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>m B<sup>b</sup>m/A<sup>b</sup> G<sup>b</sup> G<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>m

*mf* *p*

55 *8ve up, but only if possible*

in our hands That time seems so

B<sup>b</sup>m/A<sup>b</sup> G<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup>/C D<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>m F m

*f*

61 G CHORUS 1

long a-go now Where is the rich, dark earth,

G<sup>b</sup> E<sup>b</sup>m D<sup>b</sup>/F G<sup>b</sup>

*mf* *poco maestoso*

68

Brown and moist? Where is the smell of rain drip-ping from

A<sup>b</sup>sus4 A<sup>b</sup> E<sup>b</sup>m D<sup>b</sup>/F G<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup>sus4

The Rabbits : Where? : p.3/6

4

**H INSTR**

75

gum trees?

A<sup>b</sup> C m E<sup>b</sup>/B<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup> F m

*f*

**I**

82

C m D<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup>/D<sup>b</sup> E<sup>b</sup>m D<sup>b</sup> A<sup>b</sup>

**J VERSE 3**

90

Ev - 'ry-thing fa - mi-liar — is gone Ev - 'ry-thing I

E<sup>b</sup>m D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>/A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>

*p*

*mf*

97

coun - ted on I can't run I can't swim a - way from this

D<sup>b</sup>/A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>/G<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup>m A<sup>b</sup> D<sup>b</sup>/G<sup>b</sup>

*mf*

The Rabbits : Where? : p.4/6

**K CHORUS 2**

5

104

land Where is the rich, dark earth, Brown and moist? —

*p*

Chords: D<sup>b</sup>, D<sup>b</sup>, E<sup>b</sup>m, D<sup>b</sup>/F, G<sup>b</sup>, A<sup>b</sup>sus4, A<sup>b</sup>

**L**

112

Where is the smell of rain drip-ping — from gum trees?

*mp* *mf*

Chords: E<sup>b</sup>m, D<sup>b</sup>/F, G<sup>b</sup>, A<sup>b</sup>sus4, A<sup>b</sup>sus4, E<sup>b</sup>m

**M**

119

Where are the bil - la - bongs? The long - leg - ged birds? —

*f*

Chords: D<sup>b</sup>/F, G<sup>b</sup>, A<sup>b</sup>sus4, A<sup>b</sup>, C m

125

Where are the ri - vers? They used to flow clear now they're ea - ten by mud. —

Chords: E<sup>b</sup>/B<sup>b</sup>, A<sup>b</sup>, F m, C m

The Rabbits : Where? : p.5/6



132 N ***ff*** 8ve up, but only if possible

Who

C m B<sup>b</sup>m

138 **Rall** Whispered: "From the Rabbits"

will save us

F m G<sup>b</sup> lunga ***ppp*** ***pp***

O **Tempo I (Meno)** (♩ = c. 108) **Rall**

# ABOUT OPERA

Opera is a dramatic art form in which the actors sing or speak their parts to the accompaniment of instruments.

Since it began, nearly 400 years ago, there have been many different versions of what goes into an opera, but the main elements are:

- singers use their voices (although not always by singing!) to tell a story
- the actions and the music together enhance the storytelling
- usually presented on a stage and with the characters in costume.

The music of an opera is as much a part of the drama as the costumes and scenery. It helps to create the story, by setting the mood or drawing an imaginary landscape, to take the performers and audience to a different place or time.

The composer creates a score to tell the performers and conductor how the music should sound. It contains all the information about what the orchestra or musicians play, what the singers sing and say, and how the words (the libretto) and music fit together.

## OPERA: A HISTORY

The first opera was performed in Florence in 1597, amid a climate of intense interest and patronage of the arts, particularly amongst the aristocracy. In the early 1600s an Italian composer called Monteverdi began composing operas in which the music cleverly matched the feelings of the characters.

This unique combination of acting and singing became very popular and eventually shifted from private to public performances. Cities like Venice had five opera houses, visited by all members of society.

A visitor to Italy in 1800 reported that when an opera was to be performed huge crowds would pour in from the surrounding countryside. As the inns became full, people would camp overnight. The songs for the new operas were known to everyone and were the popular songs of the day.

To this day opera is one of the most complex of all the performing arts. It combines drama, music, design and movement, and expresses emotions and feelings at the highest level.

In the 21st century, there are opera companies in every major city of the world. In Europe, even the smaller cities and towns have opera companies and houses. These companies perform operatic repertoire that spans over four centuries of music history.

There are world-wide favourites, like *Carmen* by Bizet and *La bohème* by Puccini, that are performed nearly every day somewhere in the world. There are companies that are interested in the very earliest of operas and others that like to explore the modern works of the 20th and 21st centuries. These different types of operas all share one thing in common – a combination of music and drama, where the text of the story is set to music and sung.

## THE OPERATIC VOICE

There is no precise or exact definition of the operatic voice. Many believe the operatic voice is 'born', while just as many hold to the belief that the operatic voice is 'trained'. The truth lies somewhere between the two.

It takes many years for a singer's voice to develop. Operatic voices are trained to be strong, clear and expressive in order to be heard in big halls over large orchestras without the use of microphones. Many singers start training as teenagers, but most voices are only strong enough and mature enough to sing large roles from around the age of 25 onwards.

Voices that can sustain the demands required by the operatic repertoire have many things in common. First is a strong physical technique, which allows the singer to sustain long phrases through the control of the breath. Secondly, the voice must maintain a resonance in the head (mouth, sinuses) and chest cavities and must be strong enough to be heard throughout the performance venue. Finally, all voices are defined by the actual voice 'type' and the selection of repertoire for which the voice is ideally suited.

There are four main types of voice for males and females:

RANGE	MALE	FEMALE
Highest	Counter-tenor	High soprano
High	Tenor	Soprano
Medium	Baritone (bass-baritone)	Mezzo-soprano
Low	Bass (basso profundo)	Contralto (alto)

In Opera Australia's production of *The Rabbits*, seven different voice types are used:

RANGE	MALE	FEMALE
Highest	A Scientist	Bird
High	A Society Rabbit	Flinch, Coda
Medium	A Lieutenant, A Convict, The Captain, 3 Stripe	Roxie
Low	2 Stripe	

There is a further delineation into categories (Coloratura, Lyric and Dramatic) which help to define each particular voice. The Coloratura is the highest within each voice type whose extended upper range is complemented by extreme flexibility. The Lyric is the most common of the 'types'. This voice is recognized more for the exceptional beauty of its tone rather than its power or range. The Dramatic is the most 'powerful' of the voices and is characterised by the combination of both incredible volume and 'steely' intensity.

Many voices combine qualities from each category, thus creating an individual sound. Just as each person is different from the next, so is each voice.

Interestingly, in the musical theatre genre, the lower-pitched voices (i.e. mezzo-soprano and baritone) are commonly preferred. The use of amplification can easily expose the more sensuous quality of darker timbre and allow voices of any type to be heard clearly over the accompaniment. This type of singing may also employ a different technique called 'belting' to produce a loud sound. Some musical theatre productions are often thought of as operas (*Les Misérables*, *Phantom of the Opera*) but the voice types are not traditional 'operatic' voices.

# THE RABBITS

## CAST

Bird  
KATE MILLER-HEIDKE

## MARSUPIALS

Coda  
HOLLIE ANDREW  
Flinch  
JESSICA HITCHCOCK  
Roxie  
LISA MAZA  
2 Stripe  
MARCUS COROWA  
3 Stripe  
DAVID LEHA

## RABBITS

A Scientist  
KANEN BREEN  
A Society Rabbit  
NICHOLAS JONES  
A Convict  
CHRISTOPHER HILLIER  
A Lieutenant  
SIMON MEADOWS  
The Captain  
ROBERT MITCHELL

## CREATIVE TEAM

Composer  
KATE MILLER-HEIDKE  
Librettist  
LALLY KATZ  
Adaptor & Director  
JOHN SHEEDY  
Musical Supervisor,  
Musical Arrangements  
& Additional Music  
IAIN GRANDAGE  
Designer  
GABRIELA TYLESOVA  
Musical Director  
ISAAC HAYWARD  
Lighting Designer  
TRENT SUIDGEEST  
Sound Designer  
MICHAEL WATERS  
Indigenous Consultant  
RACHAEL MAZA  
Assistant to the Designer  
MICHAEL HILI

## BAND

Piano, Cello & Piano Accordion  
ISAAC HAYWARD  
Trumpet  
CARL HARVOE  
Guitar & Electronics  
KEIR NUTTALL  
Violin  
VERONIQUE SERRET  
Bass & Tuba  
DAN WITTON

## PRODUCTION TEAM

Executive Producer  
SANDRA WILLIS  
Production Manager  
DI MISIRDJIEFF  
Stage Manager  
GARRY ALCORN  
Company Manager  
KATE MCMILLAN  
Administrators  
TAMSIN MARTIN,  
GABBY WALTERS  
Associate Sound Designer  
& Sound Operator  
NEIL MCLEAN  
Touring Head Electrician  
KYLE BOCKMANN  
Touring Head Mechanist  
JEREMY MCCOMISH  
Wig and Wardrobe Supervisor  
NICOLE ARTSETOS  
Assistant Stage Manager  
ALEXANDER DICK  
Assistant to the Musical Supervisor—Internship  
(Supported by the  
Archie Roach Foundation)  
JESSIE LLOYD  
Scenery and Properties  
OPERA AUSTRALIA WORKSHOP  
Costumes, Millinery and Wigs  
OPERA AUSTRALIA WORKSHOP

## Hollie Andrew CODA

**Hollie Andrew** graduated from WAAPA (Music Theatre) in 2002 after completing an Honours degree in Drama at Flinders University in 1999. In 2004, she was nominated for an AFI Award for Best Supporting Actress in *Somersault*, and in 2009, she received a Glug Award for Best Supporting Actress in *The Ruby Sunrise* (Ensemble Theatre). Andrew's television credits include *CNNNN*, *Life Support*, *Home and Away*, *All Saints*, *IF Awards*, *Supernova*, *Double the Fist*, *Double Take* and *Underbelly: Badness*. Her stage credits include *The Ruby Sunrise* (Ensemble Theatre); *The Adventure of Snugglespot and Cuddlepie* (Company B); *Wrong Turn at Lungfish* (Ensemble Theatre); *HAIR!* (Production Company); *Jumping the Q* and *5th* at Randwick (Naked Theatre Company); *The Last Five Years* (Echelon Productions); and the *Music By Moonlight* concert series. Andrew also toured Australia and Korea with *The Sapphires* (Company B and Black Swan State Theatre Company). Her most recent role was as Roberta Williams in the television series *Fat Tony & Co.*

## Jessica Hitchcock FLINCH

Sydney-based singer-songwriter **Jessica Hitchcock** is an up-and-coming performer. Her charismatic stage presence and versatile performance sphere draw on more than 15 years' musical experience. Hitchcock is a graduate of the Conservatorium of Music and has studied with renowned vocal coaches Joy Yates and Patricia Ortel. She also trained with Craig Carnella in New York after winning the coveted ASCAP Foundation Scholarship. While in the US, she was a featured artist at *Don't Tell Mama* and *Birdland*. The last five years have seen Hitchcock transition from jazz to opera, working with professionals such as Gayle Edwards on the workshopping of *Cloudstreet*. During this time, she has been contracted to the Short Black Opera Company, performing in the first Indigenous opera, *Pecan Summer*, by Deborah Cheetham AO, and touring across Australia to Shepparton, Melbourne, Perth and Adelaide.

## Lisa Maza ROXIE

**Lisa Maza** (Meriam/Yidindji/Dutch) works as a professional singer, actor and emcee and has done so from her base in Melbourne for the past 16 years. She completed a Certificate IV in Business (Governance) at Victoria University in 2011 and is currently a member of three Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boards. In 2007, she began co-writing, with her sister, an autobiographically inspired theatre show, *Sisters of Gelam*, which premiered at the Malthouse Theatre in November 2009. Earlier that year, Maza completed a Certificate III in Media at Open Channel and co-directed her first documentary, *Living in Two Worlds*, which premiered at the St Kilda Film Festival. Her latest documentary, *Maza's Got Talent*, screened on NITV for NAIDOC week in June 2014. In 2011, she travelled to London to perform in Belvoir St Theatre's production of *The Sapphires*. While working for Black Arm Band as Associate Producer in 2014, she was invited to perform as a featured artist in *dirtsong*, which undertook a six-city tour of China in September.

## Marcus Corowa 2 STRIPE

Drawing on his Aboriginal and South Sea Islander roots, **Marcus Corowa** combines elements of blues, jazz and funk to create a soulful, soothing sound that is distinctly his own. Corowa was a finalist in the 2010 Q Song Awards, Queensland's premier songwriting competition, and the APRA Professional Development Awards in 2011. Also in 2011, he made a spontaneous move to Sydney and has since notched up appearances at the Sydney Festival, Yabun Festival, Corroboree Festival, Cobargo Folk Festival, Nerang Folk and Bluegrass Festival, Fuse Festival, Spirit Festival and The Deadly Awards. He has also supported Archie Roach, Jessica Mauboy, Christine Anu, Mark Seymour, Marcia Hines, Frank Yamma, Vika & Linda, Toni Childs and James Reyne, to name a few. In 2012, Corowa released his debut EP, *The Greater You*, and won a Deadly Award for Most Promising New Talent in Music. Since then, he has toured extensively around Australia and has just finished recording his second EP, produced by Damien Leith, which will be released in November this year.

## David Leha 3 STRIPE

**David Leha** is from the Kamilaroi nation of Australia and the South Pacific nation of Tonga. Best known as Radical Son, Leha has been making music for ten years and has recently released his highly acclaimed debut album, *Cause 'N Affect*. His film credits include *Defining Moments*, a six-part documentary series, produced and screened by NITV, exploring the profound experiences that define our life path. Stage credits include the lead role of Pemulwuy in *I Am Eora*, a 2012 Sydney Festival production directed by Wesley Enoch and written by Anne Heiss, which ran for six weeks at Carriageworks, Sydney. In 2013, Leha was selected as a core chorister and featured artist in Archie Roach's critically acclaimed *Into the Bloodstream* concert, which toured nationally. He studied music at the Eora Centre for Visual and Performing Arts in Redfern, New South Wales, and is currently studying his Bachelor of Music with the University of Newcastle at the Newcastle Conservatorium. Leha also conducts workshops and emcees events for Beyond Empathy, Community Prophets and the Jimmy Little Foundation.

## Kanen Breen A SCIENTIST

**Kanen Breen's** opera engagements include Rodolfo in Baz Luhrmann's production of *La bohème* on Broadway, Jonathan Mills' *The Ghost Wife* at the Melbourne and Sydney festivals and at London's 2002 BITE:02 Festival, and *Love in the Age of Therapy* at the Melbourne Festival. Since 2004, as a principal artist for Opera Australia, Breen has appeared as Camille in *The Merry Widow*, Nanki-Poo in *Mikado*, Ralph Rackstraw in *Pinafore*, Marco in *Gondoliers*, Caius and Bardolf in *Falstaff*, Monostatos in *The Magic Flute*, Albert in *Albert Herring*, Pong in *Turandot*, Squeak in *Billy Budd*, Andres/Cochenille/Pittichinaccio/Frantz/Nathanael in *Tales Of Hoffmann*, Pirelli in *Sweeney Todd*, Acis in *Acis and Galatea*, and Johnny in *Bliss* at the Edinburgh Festival. His Opera Queensland roles include Nadir in *Pearlfishers*, Nanki-Poo in *Mikado*, Ramiro in *Cenerentola* and Andy Warhol in the 2014 Brisbane Festival season of *The Perfect American*. Breen has also performed in *Rigoletto* for Oz Opera, Victorian Opera's premiere of *Through the Looking Glass* and *L'Ormino* for Pinchgut Opera.

## Nicholas Jones A SOCIETY RABBIT

**Nicholas Jones** completed a Bachelor of Music Performance at the Victorian College of the Arts and has been the recipient of many prizes, including the Sleath Lowry Award, the Ross Hartnell Memorial Scholarship, the Athenaeum Award, and the AME Scholar of the Year. He was runner-up in the Melbourne Recital Centre's Great Romantics Competition, finalist in the Herald Sun Aria, multiple prize-winner at Liederfest Victoria, and winner of the Warrnambool Eisteddfod and the South Eastern Arts Festival Aria competition. He has performed in the chorus of 15 Opera Australia productions since 2007, including *Carmen* on Sydney Harbour and the *Melbourne Ring Cycle*. Jones' roles for Opera Australia include Tamino/Armoured Man 1 in *The Magic Flute* (regional tour) and Count Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville* (schools tour). He also performed in the ensemble in *South Pacific* (national tour). Roles for other companies include Bernardo in *Erwin und Elmire*, Rothschild in *Rothschild's Violin*, Soldier in *The Emperor of Atlantis* and Young Man 1 in *Pecan Summer*.

## Christopher Hillier A CONVICT

**Christopher Hillier** is one of Australia's finest young singers. He graduated from the Sydney Conservatorium with a Bachelor of Music with First Class Honours in 2006 and the National Opera Studio (London) in 2007. He is the recipient of numerous awards and scholarships, most notably the Opera Foundation Covent Garden Scholarship in 2006. Hillier joined the principal ensemble of Opera Australia in 2012 and appeared as Zurga in *The Pearlfishers*, Jupiter in *Orpheus in the Underworld*, Christian in *Un ballo in maschera* and he performed the title role in *Don Giovanni* for Opera Australia's touring production. He also made his international debut as Dr Malatesta in *Don Pasquale* in Tokyo, Japan. Hillier returned to Opera Australia in 2014 as Morales in *Carmen* and Papageno in the touring production of *The Magic Flute*, and he took the baritone solos of Faur and Duruflé in the *Requiems* for the New Zealand Chamber Choir in Wellington. In 2015, he will sing Belcore for Opera Australia in the Melbourne season of *L'elisir d'amore*.



## Simon Meadows A LIEUTENANT

**Simon Meadows** studied at the Victorian College of the Arts graduating with a Bachelor of Arts (Music) and a Graduate Diploma (Opera). His Opera Australia repertoire includes roles as Gaoler in *Tosca*, Il Messaggero in *La traviata* and Commissioner in *Madam Butterfly*. Other roles include Count Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte*, Junius and Tarquinius in *The Rape of Lucretia*, Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Marcello in *La bohème*, Marquis D'Obigny in *La traviata*, Figaro in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Cascada in *The Merry Widow*, Marullo in *Rigoletto*, Belcore in *L'elisir d'amore*, Marco in *Gianni Schicchi*, Silvio in *Pagliacci*, Tchelio in *L'amour des trois oranges*, Dancairo and Morales in *Carmen*, Jimmy in *The Parrot Factory*, David in *A Hand of Bridge* and Rupert Brooke in *The Hive*, for which he received a Green Room Award nomination. Meadows' concert engagements include Dvůrk's *Te Deum* and *The Spectre's Bride*; Schubert's *Mass in G*; Bach's *Wachet auf cantata*; Mozart's *Requiem*; Orff's *Carmina Burana*; Handel's *Messiah*; Haydn's *Nelson Mass*; Vaughan Williams' *Five Mystical Songs*, *A Sea Symphony* and *Serenade to Music*; Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*; Brahms' *Eine Deutsches Requiem* and Beethoven's *Choral Fantasia*.

## Robert Mitchell THE CAPTAIN

A veteran of almost 5,000 performances in over 120 operas, **Robert Mitchell** first sang with Opera Australia at the opening of the Sydney Opera House in 1973. Now in his 42nd year with OA, he continues to add to the list of more than 25 principal roles he has undertaken. He has been a soloist for the Sydney and Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festivals, Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, Chamber Soloists of Sydney and the Warringah and Wollongong Symphonies and has broadcast for ABC Classic FM. Robert holds a Diploma of Music Education, a Master of Creative Arts (Wollongong) and a PhD (Sydney). A past State and National President of the Australian National Association of Teachers of Singing, he has taught at Macquarie and Western Sydney Universities, lectured to music interest groups and written on a wide variety of musical subjects. He also teaches singing, adjudicates competitions and is chairman of the Opera Australia Benevolent Fund. In September 2015 Robert premiered a song cycle he commissioned from Australian composer Gordon Kerry.

## BIOGRAPHIES

### Kate Miller-Heidke BIRD & COMPOSER

**Kate Miller-Heidke** is an award-winning singer-songwriter who lives between the worlds of classical music and contemporary pop. Her latest album, *O Vertigo!*, debuted at number four on the ARIA charts, broke Australian crowdfunding records and was nominated for an ARIA Award. Her previous releases include the top-five albums *Nightflight* and *Curiouser*, which featured the multi-platinum hits *Caught in the Crowd* (winner of the Grand Prize in the 2009 International Songwriting Competition) and *Last Day On Earth*. Trained as a classical singer at the Queensland Conservatorium, Miller-Heidke has appeared at the Metropolitan Opera in New York in John Adams' *The Death of Klinghoffer*. She has performed several roles for the English National Opera and appeared in *Jerry Springer: The Opera* at the Sydney Opera House. *The Rabbits* is her debut opera as a composer.

### Lally Katz LIBRETTIST

**Lally Katz** is the most produced Australian playwright of her generation. Her recent work for the stage includes *Neighbourhood Watch*, starring Robyn Nevin at Belvoir St Theatre and Melbourne Theatre Company, and starring Miriam Margolyes at the State Theatre Company of South Australia (a production which broke their box office record). The play was nominated for a NSW Premier's Literary Award, a Helpmann Award and an Australian Writers' Guild Award. It is being adapted as a feature film with director Gillian Armstrong.

Her one-woman show, *Stories I Want to Tell You in Person*, played at Belvoir St Theatre and Malthouse Theatre in 2013, and toured from Adelaide to New York, Albury to Mexico City. In 2015, Katz stars in the ABC's television adaptation of *Stories*, which will also be published as a memoir by Allen & Unwin. Katz's previous plays, *A Golem Story* and *Goodbye Vaudeville Charlie Mudd*, both won the Victorian Premier's Literary Award. *The Black Swan of Trespass* won the New York International Fringe Festival *Producer's Choice Award*.

### John Sheedy ADAPTOR & DIRECTOR

**John Sheedy** graduated from the directors' course at NIDA in 2002 and has since worked consistently as a freelance theatre director. In August 2010, he became the Artistic Director of Barking Gecko Theatre Company. Throughout his career, Sheedy has directed productions for Belvoir St Theatre, Bell Shakespeare, Riverside Theatres Parramatta, Black Swan State Theatre Company, Sydney Opera House, Sydney Theatre Company and Griffin Theatre Company. His work has been recognised with several nominations for Helpmann and Sydney Theatre awards.

In his first season as Artistic Director of Barking Gecko, Sheedy directed a stage adaptation of Shaun Tan's children's book, *The Red Tree*, which premiered in 2011 and was produced again for the 2012 Perth International Arts Festival. Also produced for that Festival, in association with Barking Gecko, was Susie Miller's *Driving Into Walls*, also directed by Sheedy. In 2012, Barking Gecko was nominated for five Helpmann Awards for these productions, and *Driving Into Walls* transferred to Riverside Theatres Parramatta and the Sydney Opera House. In 2013, Sheedy adapted and directed Wolf Erlbruch's children's book *Duck, Death and the Tulip* for Barking Gecko and Perth International Arts Festival. In 2014, he directed *ONEFIVEZEROSEVEN*, an inclusion in the Perth International Arts Festival, and won Best Director for his production of *Storm Boy* at the Performing Arts WA Awards. His most recent work for Barking Gecko, *Jasper Jones*, which premiered in August last year, experienced great critical acclaim and a sell-out season. *The Rabbits* marks Sheedy's fourth sold-out season for Barking Gecko and his first foray into opera.

## Iain Grandage MUSICAL SUPERVISOR, ARRANGEMENTS & ADDITIONAL MUSIC

**Iain Grandage** composes, conducts and performs. He has received the prestigious Sidney Myer Performing Arts Award and the Ian Potter Emerging Composer Fellowship, and has been Composer-in-Residence with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra and Musician-in-Residence at the UWA School of Music, where he is currently an Honorary Research Fellow. As a music director, he has won Helpmann Awards for his work with Meow Meow on the Malthouse Theatre/Sydney Festival production, *Little Match Girl*, and with the cast of Sydney Theatre Company's *The Secret River*. His compositions for the theatre include Helpmann Award-winning scores for *Cloudstreet* and *The Secret River*, and Green Room Award-winning scores for *Lawn*, *In the Next Room*, *Babes in the Wood*, *The Odyssey* and *The Blue Room* for companies including Belvoir St Theatre, Black Swan State Theatre Company, Malthouse Theatre, Melbourne Theatre Company and Sydney Theatre Company. His first opera, based on Tim Winton's *The Riders*, premiered to great critical and audience acclaim in Melbourne in 2014.

## Gabriela Tylesova DESIGNER

**Gabriela Tylesova** designs sets and costumes for theatre, dance, ballet and opera. She has received numerous awards for her work, including four Helpmann Awards, four Green Room Awards, two APDG Awards and two Sydney Theatre Awards. Tylesova is a prolific designer and has worked on many shows, including *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (Sydney Theatre Company), Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Love Never Dies* (The Really Useful Company) and *Così fan tutte* (Opera Australia). She also designed sets and costumes for the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2006 Asian Games in Doha. Tylesova is currently working on the Australian Ballet's production of *Sleeping Beauty*.

## Isaac Hayward MUSICAL DIRECTOR

**Isaac Hayward** is a young music director who was recently awarded the Rob Guest Endowment Musician Award for professional development. He has worked as a music director for artists as diverse as Rhonda Burchmore, Todd McKenney, Jon English, Lucy Maunder, Michael Falzon, Bobby Fox, Queenie van de Zandt, Luke Kennedy, Martin Crewes and Verity Hunt-Ballard, and has worked as an arranger for ABC TV, Teddy Tahu Rhodes, Idea of North and Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. Isaac is also a sought-after pianist, and has played on *Mary Poppins*, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, *The Addams Family*, *Les Misérables*, *Passion*, *Grease*, *Guys & Dolls* and *Showboat*. He recently music directed *Dogfight* at the Hayes Theatre in Sydney, the *Painted from Memory* tour, and was associate music director on *Nice Work If You Can Get It* for the Production Company.

## Trent Suidgeest LIGHTING DESIGNER

*The Rabbits* marks **Trent Suidgeest**'s debut with Opera Australia. For Barking Gecko Theatre Company, he has designed *Jasper Jones*; *Duck, Death and the Tulip*; *This Girl Laughs ...*; *The Amber Amulet*; and *Fatty Wombat*. He has enjoyed collaborating on many of Perth International Arts Festival's major hits in the past few years, including *Waltzing the Wilarra* for Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company and *The Sapphires*. The latter went on to travel throughout Australia, to South Korea and to London's Barbican, and was the beginning of his main-stage work at Black Swan State Theatre Company. This early career-defining relationship consisted of more than 20 commissions, including co-productions with Queensland Theatre Company, Melbourne Theatre Company and Belvoir St Theatre.

## Michael Waters SOUND DESIGNER

**Michael** is a Green Room and three-time Helpmann Award winning sound designer. Designs include: *Anything Goes*, *The King And I*, *Dirty Dancing*, *Orpheus In The Underworld*, *ATOMIC* (Australia / New York), *Priscilla* (International), *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *Doctor Zhivago* (Australia / Korea), *Dead Man Walking*, *Grease*; *Singin' In The Rain*, *The Woman In Black*, *Dusty* and *The Boy From Oz*.

## Rachael Maza INDIGENOUS CONSULTANT

**Rachael Maza** is one of the most recognisable faces in the Australian film, television and theatre industries with performance credits including the AFI Award-winning *Radiance*, *Così* and *Lillian's Story*. A WAAPA graduate, Maza's outstanding performances have been acknowledged with a Green Room Award and a Sydney Theatre Critics Circle Award. She has also worked as a narrator for ABC Radio National and as Indigenous Liaison Advisor on films such as the multi-award-winning *Rabbit Proof Fence*. Her first foray into directing was with *Stolen* (1992) for Ilbijerri Theatre Company, however, it wasn't until 2009 that she rejoined the company as Artistic Director. Since then, she has directed *Sisters Of Gelam* (2009), *Jack Charles V The Crown* (2010), *Foley* (2011) and *Beautiful One Day* (2012).

## Sandra Willis EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

**Sandra Willis** is the Executive Producer, Touring & Outreach for Opera Australia, producing operas all over the country and initiating extensive community engagement programs. She has had a comprehensive career in the performing arts, working in a variety of roles, including General Manager of Oz Opera, Company Manager of Bell Shakespeare and Company Manager of *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert – The Musical*. After graduating from NIDA, Willis freelanced in stage, event and production management, and coordination for many of Australia's theatre companies, arts festivals and event companies. She has served as a Branch Council Member for the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance for many years and received a grant from the Australia Council to undergo their Emerging Leaders Development Program in 2012 and 2015. Sandra was a member of the Regional and Touring Arts program's Expert Assessment Panel for the Office of the Arts, making funding recommendations to the Federal Minister for the Arts. *The Rabbits* is the first new Australian work she has produced from inception.

## ABOUT OPERA AUSTRALIA

Opera Australia is Australia's national opera company, presenting more than 700 performances and playing to more than half a million people each year.

Opera is a vital part of Australia's cultural landscape. We perform the world's best loved operas under the iconic sails of the Sydney Opera House and at Arts Centre Melbourne, as well as in school halls and outback towns, on Sydney Harbour and the Gold Coast beach. Our performances are broadcast in cinemas, on national television and ABC radio. We also present lavish musicals and concerts around the country.

We bring exciting international talent to the Australian stage, and support the careers of hundreds of Australian singers, musicians and artisans. We are committed to work that communicates to all Australians through an operatic medium which resonates with 21st century audiences and contemporary society.

Visit us online at [opera.org.au](http://opera.org.au)

# O|PERA AUSTRALIA

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Opera Australia is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.



Opera Australia is supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.



Opera Australia is assisted by the NSW Government through Arts NSW.

## ABOUT RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA

Reconciliation Australia is an independent, national not-for-profit organisation promoting reconciliation by building relationships, respect and trust between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our vision is for everyone to wake to a reconciled, just and equitable Australia. Our aim is to inspire and enable all Australians to contribute to reconciliation and break down stereotypes and discrimination.

Through our programs and initiatives we work with workplaces, schools and communities to:

- connect people and organisations
- provide frameworks for action
- provide resources and toolkits
- monitor our national progress towards reconciliation
- provide policy advice
- promote success and engagement activities.

Reconciliation Australia's program, *Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning* is designed to support the 21,000+ early learning services, primary and secondary schools in Australia to develop environments that foster a higher level of knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions.

Participating schools and early learning services will be assisted to find meaningful ways to increase respect; reduce prejudice; and strengthen relationships between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Narragunnawali (pronounced narra-gunna-wally) is a word from the language of the Ngunnawal people meaning peace, alive, wellbeing and coming together.

The Ngunnawal people are Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and waterways on which Reconciliation Australia's Canberra office is located.

Visit <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/schools/> to find out more about how your school can take action.



Narragunnawali  
Reconciliation in Schools  
and Early Learning



## ABOUT MELBOURNE FESTIVAL

Melbourne Festival is one of the world's leading arts festivals, and one of Australia's premier celebrations of art and culture from around the world. Each Festival brings an unparalleled feast of dance, theatre, music, visual arts, multimedia and outdoor events from renowned and upcoming Australian and International companies and artists to Melbourne.

Melbourne Festival is quintessentially Melbourne's festival—physically by reaching out into the topography and geography of the city itself, artistically by presenting Melbourne's finest artists in new works and international collaborations, and demographically by engaging with as many people of Melbourne as possible, giving them ownership of their annual international festival.

Josephine Ridge is the Artistic Director for 2013—2015 and her final year marks the celebration of the 30th Melbourne Festival.

**08—25 OCTOBER 2015**

[www.festival.melbourne](http://www.festival.melbourne)



## ABOUT BARKING GECKO THEATRE COMPANY

Barking Gecko Theatre Company is a professional Western Australian theatre company specialising in remarkable, and often unexpected, productions for children, teens and families. Barking Gecko's vision is to inspire audiences of all ages to embrace a creative life full of curiosity, empathy and play. Since 1991, the company has made more than 104 productions, toured 12 countries, appeared in 22 Perth International Arts Festivals and received numerous awards. Each year, it reaches more than 35,000 people.

Barking Gecko works with extraordinary artists from Western Australia and abroad to ensure it is Australia's leading theatre company, dedicated to presenting transformational productions for children, teens and families.

[barkinggecko.com.au](http://barkinggecko.com.au)



## ABOUT WEST AUSTRALIAN OPERA

West Australian Opera's vision is to enrich the cultural landscape by presenting world-class opera that is vibrant, new, exciting, surprising, relevant and accessible to the widest possible audiences. West Australian Opera has a reputation for collaboration and coproduction, which has resulted in partnerships with opera houses and festivals around Australia and the world. Each year, the company presents opera, featuring outstanding national and international opera singers, in the beautiful and historic His Majesty's Theatre with the West Australian Opera Chorus and the West Australian Symphony Orchestra.

[waopera.asn.au](http://waopera.asn.au)



## ABOUT PERTH INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL

Founded in 1953 by The University of Western Australia, the Perth International Arts Festival is the longest running international arts festival in Australia and Western Australia's premier cultural event.

The Festival has developed a worldwide reputation for excellence in its international program, the presentation of new works and the highest quality artistic experiences for its audience.

For 63 years the Festival has welcomed to Perth some of the world's greatest living artists and now connects with over 500,000 people each year in Perth and the Great Southern.

Wendy Martin is the Artistic Director 2016–19.

[perthfestival.com.au](http://perthfestival.com.au)





# OPERA GLOSSARY

**ACT** — a major section (like a chapter of a novel) of a dramatic production. Each act may consist of a number of scenes. An opera may have one or more acts.

**ACCOMPANIMENT** — the music that supports or plays a secondary role to the melody. The accompaniment can be sung or played.

**ARIA** — a solo song.

**CHORD** — more than one note sounded simultaneously. This can be described as a vertical arrangement of notes as opposed to a melody, which is a horizontal order of pitches.

**ENSEMBLE** — a group of musicians. Generally this term is used to describe a chamber size, in contrast to a solo or symphonic size combination of voices or instruments. In opera ensemble can refer to any music written for two or more voices.

**HARMONY** — any combination of notes that are sung or played simultaneously. Usually the word harmony refers to a pleasing combination of those sounds (but not always).

**INTERVAL** — the distance between two notes.

**KEY** — the presence of tonality.

**LIBRETTO** — the text of the opera.

**LYRICIST (LIBRETTIST)** — a writer who transforms prose into something suitable for a song setting. This writer has the skills of a poet to structure the text into verses.

**MAJOR/MINOR** — the modality in harmony. These can be demonstrated by simple triads or coloured by extra notes.

**MUSICAL THEATRE** — a work for the stage that is similar to an operetta. It can share the same characteristics of an opera with the addition of spoken dialogue (as distinct to sung dialogue as in a recitative).

**OPERA** — A work for the stage that combines music with dramatic and theatrical elements. An opera can be of any length, combined with instrumental forces of any size, and can be based on stories of any type. An opera in the 16th century can be very different from those created in the 20th century.

**OSTINATO** — A repeated musical or rhythmic pattern

**TEXTURE** — the layers of sound. Different combination of pitches and of instruments can create interesting sound that can be described as heavy or light, thick or thin.

**THEME** — a melody belonging to a passage of music or assigned to a dramatic character.

**TIMBRE** — the character or quality of a musical sound or voice.