

Operatunity Oz

*premieres Sunday, October 8, 2006
at 7.30pm on ABC TV
4x55"*




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Television

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ABC TV in association with Opera Australia proudly presents....

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(4 x 55")

Premieres Sunday, October 8, 2006 at 7.30pm

Head of Judging Panel	Richard Gill
Judges	Yvonne Kenny
	Antoinette Halloran
	Elke Neidhardt
	Anna Connolly

Writer / Director	Simon Target
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Series Producer	Nick Lee
Executive Producer	Tim Clark
Head of Factual Entertainment	Denise Eriksen

Opera Australia Team

Chief Executive	Adrian Collette
Music Director	Richard Hickox
Executive Producer	Stuart Maunder
Artistic Liaison Manager/ Operatunity Oz Workshop Coordinator	Elizabeth Hill

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Operatunity Oz

Premieres Sunday, October 8, 2006 at 7.30pm

Success comes about when preparation meets opportunity. For a group of ordinary Australians with extraordinary voices **Operatunity Oz** is a chance to fulfil one of their wildest dreams - to sing at the Sydney Opera House.

ABC TV, in association with Opera Australia, is proud to present **Operatunity Oz** - a search for Australia's next singing sensation.

Operatunity Oz scoured the nation in a quest to find a star of the future. Over four drama-filled episodes the best non-professional singers from all parts of Australia, who dream of becoming an opera star, are given the opportunity to step out of the shower stalls and backyard sheds and shine in the national spotlight.

Standards and expectations are sky-high, and the competition is fierce in the demanding world of opera, but there's no shortage of hopefuls.

ABC TV received almost 2,000 five-minute DVD and video auditions from around the nation as well as applications from Australian citizens living as far a field as China, Europe and New Zealand.

Operatunity Oz captured the public's imagination and wannabe singers from all walks of life enthusiastically embraced the quest - sending in video evidence of their singing prowess in the hope of proving to the judges that they had the potential to win the competition, sing at the Sydney Opera House, and secure an international recording deal with ABC Classics.

From the 2,000 entries, the **Operatunity Oz** judges - headed by prominent conductor Richard Gill, alongside superstar soprano Yvonne Kenny, up-and-coming soprano Antoinette Halloran, opera director Elke Neidhardt, and voice coach Anna Connolly - were faced with the daunting task of selecting the lucky ones to go through to the first round of live auditions.

Entries included a Brisbane plumber, a Perth courier, a judge's associate from Adelaide, a publican's daughter from Newcastle, as well as accountants and academics, even a quartet of teachers from one of the most remote regions of Australia. Australia's migrant communities also took up the challenge and sent in samples of their singing ability - including an Iranian English teacher with a love of Neapolitan song, and an imposing Greek Elvis impersonator.

Soon, 100 would-be opera stars were given a chance to perform a live audition for the judges. In every State, the contestants displayed a deep passion for singing, and their vitality, energy and willingness to have a go and unleash their inhibitions was a revelation to the judges.

The judges selected the top 20 singers they believed had a special voice and the potential to be trained to a high performance level. They underwent a gruelling series of intensive singing, movement and language master classes before the final six were selected to attend another round of workshops in Melbourne.

But the judges' almost overwhelming mission to choose 'the one' with the stage presence, dramatic acting talent and most importantly - a voice to pierce the heart and sing in a supreme theatrical event, Opera Australia's *Rigoletto* at the Sydney Opera House, had only just begun...

The Top 20...

Sunday, October 15 at 7.30pm

Finding a luminous new talent is an eternally seductive pursuit...

In the second part of **Operatunity Oz**, the quest to discover a star of the future intensifies as the top 20 would-be opera singers from an initial 2,000 entries begin an intensive workshop of singing, musicality, acting and language master classes.

Competition is fierce and standards sky-high as the unique opportunity to sing with the best at the Sydney Opera House looms as a life-changing experience.

Is it possible to train an unknown singer to perform an opera on one of the world's most famous stages? Many of the contestants are young, inexperienced and nervous.

Promising tenors, budding baritones and emerging sopranos share the extraordinary power of opera, but the workshop process is gruelling as the pressure to win over the judges intensifies. It's show and tell in front of the toughest critics, and one small mistake can prove fatal.

Acclaimed for her performances in operatic roles by Handel, Mozart and Strauss, diva Yvonne Kenny joins the **Operatunity Oz** judging panel headed by conductor, Richard Gill, alongside up-and-coming soprano Antoinette Halloran, opera director Elke Neidhardt, and voice coach Anna Connolly.

The judges task is to spot the talent hidden behind the contestants' nerves. Opera singing is very cruel – a good voice is not enough. They have to be able to read music, sing in tune together, follow language and music instructions and learn to express deep emotion often in a foreign language.

It's a tremendous opportunity for these novice singers to learn from the best and get a crash course in stagecraft from Yvonne Kenny, Australia's most popular soprano.

Opera director Elke Neidhardt is deliberately blunt and paints a grim picture to test the contestants resolve.

Watching how these 'apprentices' respond to criticism and how they learn from international opera stars makes compelling viewing.

There's a genuine contest between the women with eight impressive sopranos with real potential, while all the blokes are under pressure, and the delicate process of unlocking deeply buried passions is taking its toll.

The last day of the workshop is judgement day. The contestants have just one shot to get it all right – action, music, words, voice.

Only six contestants will be chosen to go through to the next round in this make-or-break moment.



The Judges

Richard Gill – Head of the Judging Panel



Maestro Richard Gill is many things - the people's conductor, musical director of the newly formed Victorian Opera and former artistic director of the highly respected touring ensemble OzOpera. He is hell-bent on improving music education in Australia, but to the contestants in **Operatunity Oz** he is also a confidant, an inquisitor, a musical genius and saviour.

It's an understatement to say Richard has a masterful understanding of music – and especially singing. The erudite pianist with his shock of grey hair in many ways resembles the first TV scientist, Professor Julius Sumner Miller.

Richard certainly has the same level of passion for his chosen subject and imparts his knowledge in an entertaining, forthright manner. Every time he is on screen his firm nurturing manner fascinates the viewer. Like all the judges, Richard is completely committed to **Operatunity Oz** despite a heavy work schedule.

Yvonne Kenny



Operatunity Oz took superstar soprano Yvonne Kenny on an emotional journey. The diva was often moved to tears by the calibre and deeply passionate voices of the contestants. Never afraid to take risks herself, she is full of admiration for the courage shown by the **Operatunity Oz** contestants.

An extraordinarily generous teacher, Yvonne has profound technical knowledge and is able to articulate it to the point where improvements in the contestants' voices magically appear. She is the real deal with a deep curiosity and uncompromising approach to her art.

One of the most distinguished sopranos of her generation, Yvonne is internationally recognised for her recordings, with a catalogue ranging from greatest hits compilations to little known works, all of which enhance her status as ABC Classics most popular recording artist.

Antoinette Halloran



Hot young soprano Antoinette Halloran certainly empathises with the **Operatunity Oz** contestants. Antoinette used to be a waitress at the Victorian Arts Centre until she was given the sack for eating too many scones!

She is now singing major roles with Opera Australia at the Arts Centre and Sydney Opera House. A striking brunette with a superb voice, her musical interests range from opera to musical theatre and cabaret. She even sang with Elvis Costello at this year's Sydney Festival.

A big sister to many of the **Operatunity Oz** contestants, Antoinette was always on hand and willing to offer some succinct advice and technical tips. Her soaring voice matched with her sassy demeanour enamoured Antoinette to the contestants, and will captivate viewers.

The Judges continued

Elke Neidhardt



German born freelance opera director Elke Neidhardt has received considerable acclaim in Australia and overseas for her daring and spectacular stagings. Formerly head of production at the prestigious Cologne Opera, in 2004 Elke directed the first Australian production of Wagner's *Der Ring Des Nibelungen* for the State Opera of South Australia. It was highly praised by critics for its lucid narrative and lack of pretentiousness. While Wagner is one of her great strengths, her repertoire spans all composers and periods and her disciplined approach to her work has reinforced her reputation in the opera world.

Elke has lectured at NIDA and the Sydney Conservatorium. Stern and forthright, she pushes the contestants hard. It's tough to get a start in opera and Elke is deliberately blunt when she paints a grim picture of a life in opera to test the contestants' resolve.

Anna Connolly



With more than 20 years teaching experience and as the winner of countless prestigious singing awards, voice specialist Anna Connolly is renowned for her unique ability to transform the human voice. Her students have won every major singing competition in Australia.

A keen student of anatomy and physiology of the voice, Anna has presented a range of papers, lectures and workshops on the science of singing.

For all her charm Anna is a hard taskmaster and challenges the contestants to face the real power of opera. When her one-on-one classes begin, there is nowhere to hide.



The Contestants



Roy Best – a lovable 42-year-old lad who lives with his dad in Melbourne. Together they restore and race vintage cars. Roy's grandmother was taught to sing by Dame Nellie Melba. He grew up in a house full of music and cars. A carpenter who loves the “happy” colour yellow – Roy has a yellow telephone, and a yellow V8 with yellow leather seats. Opera to Roy is the ultimate demonstration of what a human voice can achieve.

(Tenor – Kew, Melbourne)



Emily Burke - 26, newly married, Emily works at the Melbourne Theatre Company office. She loves being part of the creative process and meeting lots of interesting and talented people. Originally from Tasmania, her parents are both teachers (her mother teaches music). Emily began music lessons when she was 12 and has competed in many eisteddfods and singing competitions. At 19 she moved to Melbourne and travelled to Italy for a year to study.

(Soprano – Melbourne – born Hobart)



Luke Tonkin – 29, a pirate king from Ballarat with a booming baritone voice - but he forgot to learn his aria in German! Luke works at Sovereign Hill and performs street and dinner theatre. His life revolves around music. He owns a small theatre company and his ultimate dream is to have a lead role in a professional opera production.

(Baritone – Ballarat, Vic)



Stella Zigouras – 34, a Wagnerian soprano from Melbourne, with far more experience than many of the other contestants, her strong voice nearly blew the lid off the rehearsal room. With a real thirst for knowledge Stella's musical interests stretch from Abba and Bjork to Cole Porter, Barbra Streisand and beyond. For this sole parent, music transcends everything.

(Soprano – Box Hill, Melbourne)



Gaetano Bonfante – 25, Gaetano works in a fruit and vegetable shop which means an early morning 4am rise to get to market and organise deliveries. He hopes opera will be his ticket out of the fruit and veg business. He spends almost everything on daily singing lessons and the **Operatunity Oz** prize would be a dream come true.

(Tenor – Concord, Sydney)



Jermaine Chau – 21, an architecture student at Sydney University, Jermaine loves the thought of conveying to people her understanding of the world through song. With her sense of adventure and discovery Jermaine believes architecture and singing are about “connecting and touching people with a vision”. For the happy-go-lucky soprano the combination of music and live theatre is the ultimate turn on. “Live music is about the vibration in your sternum that you cannot get on recordings,” she says.

(Soprano - West Pennant Hills, Sydney)

The Contestants *continued...*



Claire Egan – 24, has a very different musical heritage. She grew up in the small coastal city of Gisborne on New Zealand's North Island – the home of Dame Kiri Te Kanawa – listening to her mother and sister playing bluegrass and country music. Claire's a rock chick with Ben Harper and Jimi Hendrix her heroes. Claire works in a vintage guitar shop and plays a mean guitar herself.
(Soprano – Sydney, Stanmore)



Todd Keys – 30, a youth worker from NSW Central Coast, he has a big heart and a big voice. He's performed in all type of musical endeavours – from panto and Shakespeare to choirs, short films, even juggling and fire twirling. But before Operatunity Oz he'd never been to the opera, let alone sung opera. According to Todd music is up there with laughing and water – essential ingredients for life.
(Baritone – Narara, Central Coast, NSW)



John Komadina – 31, is a project manager with the NSW Dept of Housing and looks after one of Australia's oldest heritage buildings. Currently learning the piano he was once in a Croatian rock 'n' roll band. Music is everything to John and no other form can match the beauty of opera. "It's exhilarating, but hard work – like driving a fast car," he says.
(Tenor - Parramatta, Sydney)



Renae Lopez – 29, is the vivacious, dynamic flame-haired daughter of a Newcastle publican. She works as a medical imaging sales rep for a company based in Sydney. Renae has travelled the world trying to fulfil her dream to be an opera singer. She first sang as a student at Newcastle's Anglican Grammar School and has studied at Sydney's Conservatorium of Music. Renae is every competitor's nightmare – she's vibrant, vocally dazzling and naturally beautiful.
(Soprano – Newcastle born, lives in Sydney.)



Jodie McGuren – 31, country and western tragic, Jodie spent her childhood in rural NSW (Lake Hume) riding and shooting. At school she was renowned for singing Cold Chisel songs and dropping her twin sister in a septic tank. For years she has longed to be an opera singer. She now lives in Sydney and like many singers waiting for a break, she teaches to pay the bills. She also paints and works as a credit card fraud investigator. Currently she sings with the Sydneian Bach Choir and once a year in the Music Hall Show at St Paul's College at Sydney University because "it's the only time (she's) allowed to sing in front of a paying audience whilst drunk".
(Soprano – Baulkham Hills, Sydney)

The Contestants *continued...*



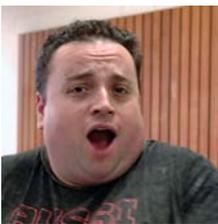
Cathy Mooney - 42, the Lismore grandmother loves music and life full stop. She studied piano as a child but singing is her main love. Santa once gave her a tin whistle for Christmas and she has always wanted to master it but her hectic schedule of family, work and other interests leaves little time for such indulgences. A passionate believer in the “depth” of music, the “feeling” of opera never ceases to amaze her.
(Soprano - Lismore, NSW)



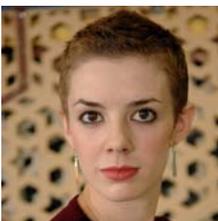
Mary-Jean O'Doherty – 23, is feeling the true power of opera for the first time. In spite of her tender age the church chorister is a classical musician. She began her musical training at seven with recorder lessons, and started on the flute at 13 before being accepted into the North Carolina School of Arts High School. At East Carolina University she studied flute, piano and languages (French, German, Italian) while concurrently earning a degree in psychology.
(Soprano – Five Dock, Sydney)



David Parkin – 26, tall, dark and handsome, David works as a computer engineer with a Sydney legal firm and has only had a handful of singing lessons. David is a technical analyst who loves problem-solving, and few of his engineering IT colleagues know about his rare bass voice. David's family has been telling him for years to take his singing seriously.
(Bass – Leichhardt, Sydney)



Nick Savas – 31, an Elvis tribute artist, Nick is a 15-year veteran of live performance. By day he's a logistics assistant at Woolworths, by night he's a member of the army of impersonators that keep the Elvis Presley legend alive. He's never done opera before, so can the **Operatunity Oz** judges take him from Las Vegas to La Scala? The nightclub crooner has a powerful tenor voice, with an uncanny resemblance to the King's.
(Tenor – Kingswood, Sydney)



Victoria Wallace – 24, a young mother who only recently discovered the beauty of classical singing and started taking it seriously. A class clown at school her talent for talking got her sent out a lot. The doting mother sews clothes and quilts, which teaches her patience – an important part of singing. Victoria had an accident with hair dye and wore a wig for her video audition, but her contralto voice reduced judge, Antoinette Halloran, to tears.
(Soprano – Narellan, Sydney)



John Roehrig – 37, is a hunky, married guitar-playing Brisbane plumber. In the mid-90s John toured country Queensland towns with his Bon Jovi tribute band. An “ordinary” Aussie bloke who sings at local old folks homes, John's a naturally gifted tenor with almost no formal training. He practices 2-3 hours a day in the backyard shed. He has a powerful instrument and a unique sound, but can the judges get him to sing in tune?
(Tenor - Brisbane)

The Contestants continued...



Jeremy Ryan – 23, newly married with a young baby daughter, this Perth courier driver thought he was a baritone but turned out to be a tenor. Famous at school for his Michael Jackson impersonations, Jeremy didn't always appreciate operatic music. "Opera is like beautiful red wine," he says. "Once you have acquired a taste for it you can never go back to cheap pop drinks."
(Tenor – Perth)



James Elford – 22, an IT consultant in Canberra keeps super fit playing soccer – his second love next to singing. A primary school teacher gave James the idea he could only sing if his jaw was locked open – now wonder James became famous at high school for fitting his entire fist into his mouth! Music makes James feel special, and while he loves his job if it became a choice between work and singing....music would win hands down.
(Baritone – Canberra)



Damien Hall – 31, sheer hard work in loads of local amateur theatre productions paid off for Damien. Recently the Victorian College of the Arts was so impressed with his lush baritone voice it offered him a scholarship in its three-year BMus undergraduate degree course. Damien hopes his extensive experience in local productions will benefit his operatic performance. "You need to be able to sing, act and move well in opera these days," he says.
(Baritone – Canberra)



Johanna Palenschus – 23, a judge's associate in Adelaide, Johanna wants to be an opera singer because she loves the passion, the intrigue and drama in opera. Hoping to meet Opera Australia's heartthrob Angus Wood, Johanna arrived at the audition with a soliloquy to her pin-up boy.
(Soprano – Adelaide)



Production Team

Simon Target – Writer / Director

Born in England to Australian parents Simon Target has had a life long interest in music, opera and the arts. He read English Literature and Music at Trinity College, Cambridge, before attending the National Film and TV School. Simon was born to direct **Operatunity Oz**. He met his wife at the opera and got married at the Sydney Opera House. Simon has directed live opera productions in Europe and the USA as well as the cult film Backsliding, starring Tim Roth.

He's renowned for his award-winning self-filmed observational documentaries such as Kings School, The Academy, and Rough Justice. Most recently he made the food and travel programs Surfing The Menu, Kylie Kwong, Heart and Soul and Simply Magic.

Nick Lee – Series Producer

Nick's 25 years experience as an editor and producer has seen him based in such diverse locations as London and Alice Springs. As a freelance film editor he's edited feature films and documentaries. In 1993 he Series Produced 24 half-hour episodes of the magazine program Aboriginal Australia. After 20 years away from the ABC Nick returned in 2003 as a Series Producer on George Negus Tonight and last year Series Produced Talking Heads.

Nick first sang for his local church choir while in primary school and maintained an interest in singing in his teens performing madrigals and choral works at secondary school, including three performances of the Messiah as a treble, alto and then tenor over five years! But it was working backstage at Covent Garden in 1978 that really ignited Nick's passion for opera and although he no longer sings any where more public than an shower, he still enjoys pumping up the volume on a little Verdi or Mozart when relaxing.

Tim Clark - Executive Producer

Tim Clark is Executive Producer of Factual Entertainment programs for ABC Television. His distinguished career has encompassed extensive experience as a documentary filmmaker, foreign correspondent as well as a television and radio reporter. He has made over 40 television documentaries and won numerous awards. Before becoming a documentary maker he was a political correspondent in the Federal Parliament in Canberra, and for four years the ABC's London correspondent. He is an enthusiastic lover of opera.

Denise Eriksen - Head ABC TV Factual Entertainment

Denise Eriksen has extensive television experience in both Australia and Britain. Her credits include "The Games" with John Clarke. She has worked as an Executive Producer for Granada (UK) in its multi-channel development area and as Head of Content and Deputy Channel Controller on the Community Channel - a Sky Digital Channel that works in partnership with the BBC, ITV and Channel Four. At ABC TV, she has responsibility for a broad range of factual programs, including Gardening Australia, Dynasties, Collectors, Talking Heads, Outback House, Can We Help, Peking To Paris, Dusty: Little By Little and Operatunity Oz.

Opera Australia Team

Adrian Collette – Chief Executive

Adrian Collette is Chief Executive of Opera Australia. His career has combined commercial experience, teaching and performing. Born 1955 in Sri Lanka, he attended Trinity Grammar School in Melbourne and studied at La Trobe University (BA with Honours) and Melbourne University (MA in English literature). In the early 1980s he joined Victoria State Opera as a member of their Young Artist Program, and performed with the company for six years. In 1987, he joined Reed Books and within a few years became the company's Marketing Director and then Managing Director, until he joined Opera Australia in 1997. Adrian Collette is a Member of the Victorian Council for the Arts, a Member of the Australian Entertainment Industry Association's Executive Council and a Trustee of Sydney Grammar School.

Richard Hickox – Music Director

Richard Hickox is Music Director of Opera Australia and Principal Conductor of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales; he is also Associate Guest Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra. Guest engagements include performances with the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Leipzig Gewandhaus and the Philharmonia Orchestra, Vienna State Opera, Los Angeles Opera, English National Opera and the Royal Opera, Covent Garden. His forthcoming operatic engagements with Opera Australia include Janáček's *Jenůfa* and Handel's *Julius Caesar* in 2006, and Dvořák's *Rusalka*, Handel's *Alcina*, Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffmann* and Wagner's *Tannhäuser* in 2007. Richard Hickox was awarded a CBE in 2002, and has received many other awards including two Royal Philharmonic Society Music Awards, a Grammy and six Gramophone Awards. He has made over 250 recordings including Opera Australia's *The Love for Three Oranges* released through Chandos Records.

Stuart Maunder – Executive Producer

Stuart Maunder has directed for all the major opera companies in his native Australia. From 1991 he has combined a career in Australia with engagements in the United Kingdom, Europe and the USA. His productions for Opera Australia include *The Gypsy Princess*, *The Magic Flute*, the world premiere of *Lindy*, Rossini comedies *La scala di seta* and *Il Signor Bruschino*, and the French tragedies *Manon* and *Romeo & Juliette* and the Gilbert and Sullivan operas *HMS Pinafore*, *Trial by Jury*, *Iolanthe*, *The Gondoliers*, *The Mikado* and most recently, *The Pirates of Penzance*. In 2007 he will direct a new production of *The Tales of Hoffmann*. Stuart has also directed the hit musical *Dusty- The original Pop Diva* and his own one-man G&S revue for the Adelaide Cabaret Festival. He manages to combine all of this with his day job as Executive Producer of Opera Australia.

Elizabeth Hill – Artistic Liaison Manager/ Operatunity Oz Workshop Coordinator

Elizabeth was born in Melbourne, Australia. Her training in the performing arts is the discipline of dance at the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts. Elizabeth danced with the West Australian Ballet for 9 years and also worked as rehearsal director and choreographer. In 1995, Elizabeth left ballet to pursue a freelance career in choreography and direction. Since then she has choreographed works for The Australian Ballet, West Australian Academy of Performing Arts, the Victorian College of the Arts, West Australian Ballet, West Australian Opera, Opera Queensland, State Opera of South Australia and Opera Australia. Her choreographic credits for Opera include *Fledermaus*, *Samson et Dalila*, *Lakme*, *The Gypsy Princess*, *The Gondoliers* and *The Pirates of Penzance*. She completed a Graduate Diploma in Arts Management from Melbourne University in 2002 and joined Opera Australia in the role of Company Manager, recently moving to the position of Artistic Liaison Manager.