



MISO

MID-SEASON GALA
THAI'S
OPERA IN CONCERT

26 AUGUST 2017

CONCERT PROGRAM



Principal Partner

Athanaël, Cénobite monk.....**Quinn Kelsey** baritone
Nicias, young Sybarite philosopher.....**Diego Silva** tenor

Palemon, old Cénobite monk.....**Daniel Sumegi** bass

A servant.....**Maurice Wan** bass

Thaïs, actress and courtesan.....**Erin Wall** soprano

Crobyle, slave.....**Jacqueline Porter** soprano

Myrtale, slave.....**Fiona Campbell** mezzo-soprano

Albine, abbess.....**Liane Keegan** contralto

'La Charmeuse'.....**Eva Kong** soprano

Cénobite monk.....**Jean-Francois Ravat** tenor

Cénobite monk.....**Maurice Wan** bass

*Cénobites, histrions and actors, philosophers,
friends of Nicias, people, White Nuns*

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra Chorus

Anthony Hunt guest chorus master

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra

Eoin Andersen concertmaster

Sir Andrew Davis conductor

Tianyi Lu assistant conductor

Massenet

Thaïs

Running time: 2 hours and 40 minutes, including 20-minute interval

In consideration of your fellow patrons, the MSO thanks
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MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Established in 1906, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (MSO) is an arts leader and Australia's oldest professional orchestra. Chief Conductor Sir Andrew Davis has been at the helm of MSO since 2013. Engaging more than 2.5 million people each year, and as a truly global orchestra, the MSO collaborates with guest artists and arts organisations from across the world.

The MSO performs a variety of concerts ranging from core classical performances at its home, Hamer Hall at Arts Centre Melbourne, to its annual free concerts at Melbourne's largest outdoor venue, the Sidney Myer Music Bowl. The MSO also delivers innovative and engaging programs to audiences of all ages through its Education and Outreach initiatives.

The MSO also works with Associate Conductor, Benjamin Northey, and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra Chorus, as well as with such eminent guest conductors as John Adams, Tan Dun, Jakub Hrůša, Mark Wigglesworth, Markus Stenz and Simone Young. It has also collaborated with non-classical musicians including Nick Cave, Sting, Tim Minchin, DJ Jeff Mills and Flight Facilities.

Image courtesy Daniel Aulsebrook



SIR ANDREW DAVIS CONDUCTOR

Sir Andrew Davis is Music Director and Principal Conductor of the Lyric Opera of Chicago and Chief Conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. In a career spanning over 40 years, he has been the musical and artistic leader at several of the world's most distinguished opera and symphonic institutions, including the BBC Symphony Orchestra (1991-2004), Glyndebourne Festival Opera (1988-2000), and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra (1975-1988). He recently received the honorary title of Conductor Emeritus from the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

One of today's most recognised and acclaimed conductors, Sir Andrew has conducted virtually all the world's major orchestras, opera companies, and festivals. Born in 1944 in Hertfordshire, England, Sir Andrew studied at King's College, Cambridge, where he was an organ scholar before taking up conducting. His wide-ranging repertoire encompasses the Baroque to contemporary, and his vast conducting credits span the symphonic, operatic and choral worlds.

In 1992 Maestro Davis was made a Commander of the British Empire, and in 1999 he was made a Knight Bachelor in the New Year Honours List. He has been awarded an honorary doctorate by Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois.

Image courtesy Dario Acosta



QUINN KELSEY
BARITONE

Quinn Kelsey's most recent roles have included Amonasro in *Aida* (Chorégies d'Orange) and the title role in *Rigoletto* (San Francisco Opera and Oper Frankfurt). Future performances include *Rigoletto* at the Lyric Opera of Chicago and *Peter in Humperdinck's Hänsel and Gretel* at the Metropolitan Opera. His 2016 schedule included appearances at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden (Count di Luna in *Il trovatore* and Germont in *La traviata*), Enrico in *Lucia di Lammermoor* at Chicago Lyric Opera, *Rigoletto*s in Hawaii, Paris and Zurich, and Marcello in *La bohème* at the Metropolitan. In 2018, he appears in *Lucia* and *Trovatore* at the Met, and *Don Carlo* at Washington National Opera.

Quinn Kelsey's career in opera began in 1991 in the chorus of Hawaii Opera Theatre. His list of programs and study include the Chautauqua Institute, San Francisco's Merola Opera Program and Chicago's Lyric Opera Center for American Artists. For two seasons he was accepted to the roster of the Marilyn Horne Foundation. He sang the role of Athanaël in *Thaïs* with Sir Andrew Davis in 2011.

Image courtesy Ken Howard



DIEGO SILVA
TENOR

Diego Silva's recent roles have included Nemorino in *The Elixir of Love* with the Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra, the title role of Faust at the Vilnius City Opera, and Tybalt in Bartlet Sher's production of *Roméo et Juliette* at the Metropolitan Opera, New York. He has also recently sung the Duke in *Rigoletto* in Lucerne, Leicester in *Maria Stuarda* in Edmonton and Alfredo in *La traviata* both in Biel and Des Moines, and Faust at the Macau International Music Festival.

In concert he has performed in the Violon sur le Sable series in Royan, France and in opera and zarzuela recital series at Alice Tully Hall, the Konzerthaus Berlin, among other venues.

Diego Silva studied at the Curtis Institute, Philadelphia with further studies at Philadelphia's Academy of Vocal Arts. He was a first prize winner of the Carlo Morelli Singing Competition and is a recipient of the Plácido Domingo Scholarship from the Sociedad Internacional de Valores del Arte Mexicano.



DANIEL SUMEGI
BASS

Daniel Sumegi has carved out an impressive international career with over one hundred roles in his repertoire. He has performed at the Metropolitan Opera, Covent Garden and the Paris Opera, as well as major opera companies across Europe, Asia, South America and Australia.

Recent appearances have included the world premiere of *Manchurian Candidate* (Minnesota Opera), *The Magic Flute*, *The Pearl Fishers* and *Luisa Miller* (OA Sydney), *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, *Rigoletto* and *Eugene Onegin* (OA Melbourne), *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (Melbourne, Seattle and San Francisco), *Madama Butterfly* (Metropolitan Opera), Daland in *Der fliegende Holländer* (Seattle, Adelaide), *Rigoletto*, *Billy Budd* (Los Angeles), *Salome* (Washington, Hong Kong) and *Götterdämmerung* (Strasbourg and Tokyo)

Daniel Sumegi appears on CD in Seattle Opera's acclaimed *Ring Cycle*, and on DVD in the San Francisco Opera Production of *Capriccio* and Opera Australia's *Don Giovanni*.



ERIN WALL
SOPRANO

Erin Wall appears at leading opera houses, including the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, Opéra Nationale de Paris, and Lyric Opera of Chicago. She has appeared with orchestras such as the Boston Symphony, London Symphony, Orchestre de Paris, Residency Orchestra of The Hague, and NHK Philharmonic (Tokyo), as well as orchestras in her native Canada such as the National Arts Center Orchestra (Ottawa) and Orchestre symphonique de Montréal.

Erin Wall's 2016-17 season included her company debut with San Francisco Opera as Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, a return to Vancouver Opera for her role debut as Desdemona in *Otello*, a return to Michigan Opera to sing Anna Sorenson in Kevin Puts' Pulitzer Prize-winning opera *Silent Night*, and the leading role in Samuel Barber's *Vanessa* with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin and at Santa Fe.

Her recordings include two each of Mahler's Eighth Symphony and Beethoven's Ninth, plus a recent *Messiah* with Sir Andrew Davis and the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir and Toronto Symphony. She sang the role of Thais with Sir Andrew Davis at the Edinburgh Festival in 2011.



JACQUELINE PORTER
SOPRANO

Jacqueline Porter holds an honours degree in Music Performance and a Bachelor of Arts (Italian) from the University of Melbourne. Equally at home on the operatic stage and the concert platform, Jacqueline appears regularly with Australia's major symphony orchestras and choral societies.

Performance highlights include *Peer Gynt* (Grieg), *The Ugly Duckling* (Prokofiev) and *Bachianas Brasileiras* No.5 (Villa Lobos) with Sydney Symphony Orchestra; Fauré's Requiem, Mahler's Symphony No.4, Mozart's Requiem and Rachmaninoff's *The Bells* with Melbourne Symphony Orchestra; Tavener's *Song of the Angel* (Dark MOFO Festival) and *Last Night of the Proms* with Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra.

Operatic roles include Susanna (*le nozze di Figaro*); Despina (*Così fan tutte*); Princess (*Sleeping Beauty*); Drusilla (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*) for Victorian Opera and Gretel (*Hänsel and Gretel*) for State Opera of South Australia.

Jacqueline has recently performed a Viennese program with the Adelaide Symphony and Mozart's *Exsultate jubilate* with the MSO. She will later return to the MSO to perform Beethoven's Symphony No.9 in the 2017 Season Finale Gala.



FIONA CAMPBELL
MEZZO-SOPRANO

Fiona Campbell is one of Australia's most versatile and beloved classical singers – a producer and guest ABC presenter, accomplished international performer, recitalist and recording artist. Fiona was the winner of the national Limelight Award for Best Solo Performance 2011 and vocal winner of the ABC Young Performer of the Year Award and the ASC Opera Awards.

Fiona sings regularly as a principal artist with all the major ensembles and orchestras in Australia and with Opera Australia, Opera Queensland and WA Opera. Her international collaborators have included the Brodsky Quartet, Tokyo Philharmonic, Manchester Camerata, Prague Chamber Orchestra, Hong Kong Philharmonic and Glyndebourne Festival Opera.

Career highlights include concerts with the legendary tenor José Carreras in Japan and Korea and as his special guest artist in Australia. 2017 appearances include Alisa (*Lucia di Lammermoor*) for WA Opera, Gertrude/Witch (*Hänsel and Gretel*) in Singapore and concert performances with TSO, MSO and Australian Chamber Orchestra.



LIANE KEEGAN
ALTO

Liane Keegan has received scholarships from the Opera Foundation Australia, Shell Royal Covent Garden Scholarship which enabled her to study at the National Opera Studio London. She attended the AIMS summer School in Graz Austria on the Opera Australia Foundation Scholarship and in 1997, she won a Bayreuth Bursary from the Wagner Society of Great Britain.

Throughout her career, Liane's roles have included Azucena (*Il trovatore*) for the Opera of South Australia, Ulrica (*Un ballo in maschera*) for Opera Australia, Rosa Mamai (*L'Arlesiana*) and Marcellina (*Le nozze di Figaro*) with Opera Holland Park London, Filippyevna (*Eugene Onegin*) with Staatstheater Stuttgart, and Klytaemnestra (*Elektra*) and Brigitta (*Die tote Stadt*) with Theater Hagen.

Concert appearances have included Mozart's Requiem with Sir Neville Mariner and the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, Barbara in Korngold's *Violanta* at the 1997 BBC Proms conducted by Paul Daniel and Waltraute in *Die Walküre* with Antonio Pappano at the Edinburgh Festival.



EVA KONG
SOPRANO

In 2016, Eva Kong sang Liù in *Turandot* for Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour, Laura in *Luisa Miller* and Princess Linetta in *The Love for Three Oranges* for Opera Australia. Her performance as Laura earned her the 2016 Green Room Award. For the national company in 2017, she appears in *Parsifal* and *Great Opera Hits*, takes the sopranos solos in *Carmina Burana* for the Melbourne Symphony and revisits one of her most famous roles (Madame Mao in *Nixon in China*) for the Sydney Opera House.

Winner of the Giacomo Lauri-Volpi International Competition, she received a Helpmann Award Nomination and was a Green Room Award Winner for Best Female in a Supporting Role for her performance as Madame Mao in *Nixon in China* for Victorian Opera.

Eva has also sung Gilda (*Rigoletto*) and Donna Anna (*Don Giovanni*) for Opera Australia; Pamina (*The Magic Flute*), Gretel (*Hänsel and Gretel*) and Amina (*La sonnambula*) for Pacific Opera.



MELBOURNE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA CHORUS

For more than 50 years the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra Chorus has been the unstinting voice of the Orchestra's choral repertoire.

The MSO Chorus sings with the finest conductors, including Sir Andrew Davis, Edward Gardner, Mark Wigglesworth, Bernard Labadie, Masaaki Suzuki and Manfred Honeck, and is committed to developing and performing new Australian and international choral repertoire. The Chorus has also premiered works by such composers as James MacMillan, Arvo Pärt, Hans Werner Henze, Alfred Schnittke, Gavin Bryars, and Pēteris Vasks.

Recordings by the MSO Chorus for Chandos and ABC Classics have received critical acclaim. It has performed across Brazil and at the Cultura Inglese Festival in Sao Paolo, in Kuala Lumpur with the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra, with The Australian Ballet, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, West Australian Symphony Orchestra, Barbra Streisand, at the Melbourne International Arts Festival, the AFL Grand Final, the Sydney Olympic Arts Festival, and Anzac Day commemorative ceremonies.

Tonight sees MSO Chorus members Maurice Wan and Jean-Francois Ravat perform roles as Cénobite monks.



ANTHONY HUNT GUEST CHORUS MASTER

Anthony Hunt (ARAM) has been the Chorus Master at Opera Australia since 2013, after 4 years working as Assistant Chorus Master. As a répétiteur and conductor, he has prepared the Opera Australia Chorus for the *Ring* Cycles in Melbourne in 2013 and 2016, and for the performances of *La traviata*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Aida*, *Turandot* and *Carmen* on the outdoor Harbour stage, alongside over 30 operas for the mainstage at Sydney Opera House and The State Theatre Melbourne.

Hunt studied Piano and Organ performance at the Elder Conservatorium of Music, University of Adelaide, completing an Honours Bachelor of Music, before moving to London, receiving a Masters degree as a répétiteur from the Royal Academy of Music.

He was for many years the Assistant Organist at St Peter's Cathedral in Adelaide, has been a participant in the Symphony Australia Conductor Development Program, and was a Young Artist with the State Opera of South Australia.

SYNOPSIS

Massenet's opera *Thaïs* is set in fourth century Egypt.

Athanaël is a young man who has left the great city of Alexandria with all its temptations to live the life of a monk in the desert.

The greatest of those temptations is Thaïs, a courtesan and devotee of the goddess Venus. Athanaël has decided that it is his mission to convert her to Christianity.

Despite the warnings of his fellow monks he leaves for Alexandria, where he visits his old friend Nicias, who tells him that Thaïs is his lover and will shortly arrive to spend their final night together.

She appears and is introduced to Athanaël, who informs her of his intentions. She laughs, but later in her rooms, in the beautiful 'mirror aria', she realises that her beauty will not last forever, resulting in a change of heart; this is portrayed in the famous solo violin piece, *Meditation*.

Thaïs informs Athanaël that she will allow him to take her to a convent, but in the midst of this, Nicias returns with a large crowd who are enraged at the news and attempt to stone Athanaël.

Nicias, however, respects Thaïs' decision and throws gold coins into the crowd, giving Athanaël and Thaïs the chance to escape.

At an oasis in the desert the pair rest. Athanaël takes pity on Thaïs, her exhaustion becoming too much.

He brings her water, resulting in their most tender moment.

He leads her to the convent where Albine, the Abbess, welcomes her and Athanaël leaves with the distressing knowledge that he will never see her again. Back with his fellow monks, Athanaël obsesses over Thaïs, resulting in two visions.

In the first vision she appears in all her former seductive power to tempt him, but in the second tells him that she is about to die. Distraught he rushes to the convent where, finding her on her deathbed, he tells her that everything that she had been told was a lie and that all that matters is his love and desire for her. She, however, has a vision of angels welcoming her into heaven, and dies. Athanaël is left in despair.

SIR ANDREW DAVIS ON *THAÏS*

The Opera's strange mixture of religious fervour and eroticism is what creates its power. The title role was written for the American soprano Sybil Sanderson, for whom Massenet had an obsession.

When Erin Wall, tonight's Thaïs, sang this piece with me at the Edinburgh Festival, she was hailed as 'the Thaïs of one's dreams.' I am incredibly excited to be conducting this work for you.

Sir Andrew Davis,
MSO chief conductor

PROGRAM NOTES

JULES MASSENET

(1842–1912)

Thaïs

Comédie Lyrique in three acts and seven *Tableaux*

Libretto by Louis Gallet, after the novel by Anatole France

Première: Paris, Opéra Garnier,
16 March 1894

Based on the *Golden Legend* by 13th-century chronicler and archbishop Jacopus da Varagine, Anatole France's 1890 novel *Thaïs* achieved a *succès de scandale* for its ironic, mocking, anti-clerical viewpoint. Following the 1894 premiere of Jules Massenet's 14th staged opera, *Thaïs*, an ecstatic France wrote to the composer: 'You have lifted my poor Thaïs to the first rank of operatic heroines ... I am happy and proud at having furnished you with the theme from which you have developed the most inspiring phrases. I grasp your hand with joy.'

Despite the exotic near-Eastern setting on the outskirts of fourth-century Alexandria, Massenet was initially uninterested in the story as an operatic subject. But in his libretto Louis Gallet minimised the novel's parody of the fundamentalist monk Athanaël and enriched the role of the sybaritic courtesan Thaïs. Focusing on each character's complete transformations, the drama is sparked by their diagonally opposed spiritual journeys.

In Gallet's libretto Massenet also found a fresh vehicle for his current muse,

the soprano for whom he had created *Esclarmonde* in 1889. Twenty-nine-year-old Californian Sybil Sanderson was Massenet's ideal protagonist, possessing beauty of voice, face and figure. Continuing his established practice, he tailored the role to Sanderson's vocal strengths, involving her in the compositional process and having her co-sign the final page of the score in acknowledgment of her input.

Massenet's choice to categorize *Thaïs* as a *comédie lyrique*, (comic opera), is curious. Despite Gallet's alterations, did the composer still view his two principal characters with the irony embodied in France's novel? Certainly the music contains nothing to betray that attitude. Perhaps Massenet saw the forgiveness and redemption received by Thaïs as the happy ending essential for 'comedy' in its original sense.

Employing his mastery of continuously unfolding melody and richly textured orchestration, Massenet heightens the distinction between the sacred and profane. The restraint of Athanaël's opening scene with the Cenobite monks is in stark contrast to Thaïs' ravishingly voluptuous transports of delight in her own beauty and success. As the tables turn, every musical element is employed with absolute clarity to express Thaïs' growing self-doubt, humility and final ecstatic heavenly vision. Conversely, Athanaël's final scenes reveal increasingly complex orchestration as he confesses his

passion for Thais and rejects ascetic life and reverence for spiritual love.

The ethos Gallet and Massenet create in *Thais* is arguably the perfect expression of its era: a combination of the glamour of the *Belle Époque* and the presage of the *fin de siècle*, which Max Nordau describes as a kind of 'degeneration' that incorporates ego mania and mysticism. Fully aware of the psychology of all his characters, major and minor, Massenet illuminates the pathological self-absorption and ego mania of the frivolous dandy Nicias and his coterie, while responding to the limitations of the cloistered world view of Palémon and Albine and their attendant brothers and nuns.

English critic Rodney Milnes has written, condescendingly, that: 'As we have gradually struggled out from under a post-Wagnerian, German-dominated critical aesthetic, we have been able to afford to be more relaxed about Massenet, to accept that pleasure is not by definition sinful.' Milnes does, however, acknowledge that for around 20 years Massenet was France's most popular opera composer. But like many great composers – most notably Mozart – Massenet somewhat fell out of favour after his death in 1912. Even in 1911 Richard Aldrich disparagingly wrote in the *New York Times* that *Thais*' popularity 'was gained by other elements than the music'.

In the eyes of his Gallic composer contemporaries, Massenet's worst sin

was popularity. Debussy mocked his 'facile charm': 'His brethren could not easily forgive Massenet this power of pleasing which, strictly speaking, is a gift.' The sublimely pleasing violin solo *Méditation* linking the two scenes of Act 2 is a prime example. But the reality is that this 'gift' did not come easily, despite the composer's denials. And clearly he did develop and introduce new ideas. 1892's *Werther* saw Massenet blurring the lines between recitative and aria. Was this Wagner's influence or a desire to be faithful to the lyrical flow of the French language? The latter is demonstrable in *Thais*, the first French opera set to a purely prose libretto. In fact, it paved the way for Massenet's detractor, Debussy, to create his 1902 operatic masterpiece on Maeterlinck's symbolist play *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

Massenet composed another 15 operas after *Thais* but with *Manon*, *Esclarmonde* and *Werther*, it stands at the pinnacle of his art. The new breed of composers, particularly Puccini and Strauss, may have overshadowed Massenet's greatness occasionally throughout the 20th Century, but championed by the likes of conductor Richard Bonyngé and many of today's star singers, Massenet's position in the first rank of operatic composers is firmly assured. In the dying words of Thais herself: 'The sound of golden harps delights me!'

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Image Michelle Wood, cello

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