

5 August 2019

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Inspired by an Australian violinist, a spectacular 1920s 'jazz opera' that triumphed across Europe, but was banned by the Nazis, finally gets its Australian premiere

IOpera, in collaboration with The Orchestra Project and Melbourne Opera's Richard Divall Emerging Artists Program, announces the Australian premiere performance of Ernst Krenek's 'jazz opera' *Jonny Strikes Up!* [*Jonny spielt auf*] at 8:00 pm on Friday 4 October at the Athenaeum Theatre, Melbourne.

The theatrical sensation of its day, *Jonny Strikes Up!* mixes high classical music with riotous flapper-era jazz to create a genre-defying, epoch-defining, comedy-drama, that for the first time put the sounds and sensibilities of modern city life onto the operatic stage.

After its premiere in Leipzig in 1927 it struck up in 42 opera houses across Europe, the USA, and USSR, to become arguably the most successful premiere in operatic history. However, the Nazis--offended by its forward-thinking take on contemporary sexual, racial, and musical norms--banned it as 'degenerate'. For them *Jonny Strikes Up!* was the archetype of Weimar decadence

The opera tells the story of Max, an introspective composer who feels most at home amidst the vast expanse of the Alps but who finds his otherworldly sensibilities challenged by his love for a free-spirited opera singer, Anita. Krenek later revealed in his memoirs that she was based on his recollections of a brief, passionate affair he had had with the Australian violinist Alma Moodie (1898-1943).

Through Anita, Max learns to reconcile himself to the pace and confusion of city life and take control of his own future. His personal transformation is mirrored in a sub-plot in which Jonny, an African-American jazz musician, steals a valuable violin from the self-regarding virtuoso Daniello, with the help of Anita's maid, Yvonne. The opera concludes with Max departing for America to the exuberant sound of Jonny's jazz music 'striking up', a symbolic transfer of cultural energy from the Old World to the New.

Performed as a semi-staged concert using Jeremy Sams' masterful English translation (originally created for the UK's Opera North), the cast includes leading Australian tenor Alexander Lewis (who earlier this year performed Tony in *West Side Story* with Opera Australia as part of its Handa Opera on Harbour series), Sun Aria winners Lee Abrahmsen and Rebecca Rashleigh as Anita and Yvonne respectively, and Melbourne-born tenor Shoumendu Schornikow as Jonny. The production is conducted by Peter Tregear and directed by Greg Carroll. It has been made possible through the generous support of The Cybec Foundation and Henkell Brothers Australia Pty Ltd and several private sponsors.

The Orchestra Project is a critically acclaimed ensemble which provides opportunities for gifted young musicians to perform major orchestral works alongside the very best musicians from Australia's professional orchestras.

"If this is the future for Melbourne music, it's in good hands."

The Age

Performance details

Where: The Athenaeum Theatre, Collins Street, Melbourne

When: 8:00 pm, Friday 4 October 2019

Tickets Ticketek <https://premier.ticketek.com.au/> or at the door: \$70/\$40/\$25

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