

Reinventing the classics

New artistic directors, and some new artistic directions, promise an exciting season ahead for performing arts. Chris Herden reports

Two new artistic directors will unveil debut seasons for their respective performance companies this year, a third company will christen its new home, while another will present its first fully professional production. All this means an exciting season ahead for audiences of live performance in Brisbane. Here's part one of our preview of what's on offer in 2013.

Queensland Ballet

Li Cunxin is a remarkable man with a remarkable story. His best-selling autobiography (and subsequent Bruce Beresford-directed film) *Mao's Last Dancer* is an astonishing account of one man's determination, courage and sheer hard work to succeed in the world of ballet. Li was appointed artistic director of Queensland Ballet last year and says he feels privileged to lead the 52-year-old company into the next era.

"I have chosen works that not only will inspire a love of ballet in everyone who experiences them, but will showcase our exceptionally

talented ensemble of dancers," says Li, who admits he chose a personal favourite, *Cinderella* (from 5 April), for the season's opening production. "It had to be *Cinderella*. When I first went to America, one of the first ballets I saw was *Cinderella* and it brought tears to my eyes. It's such a well-loved story. It's magical."

Two more timeless classics will follow: *Giselle* (from 21 June) and *The Nutcracker* (from 6 December) which Li wants to stage every Christmas. *Elegance* (from 2 August), is a dynamic program of works from four exciting, internationally-renowned choreographers including Brisbane's Gareth Belling.

Opera Queensland

A very different interpretation of the enchanting fairytale *Cinderella* will be a showpiece for Opera Queensland, opening from 6 July. New artistic director Lindy Hume is working on a cheeky new English translation of Rossini's opera. "I'm super-excited and eager to get into the rehearsal

room," says Hume. "It's bursting out of my head already and I can't wait to bring this crazy, dark and magical fairytale to life. It will be quirky and eccentric, set in Dickensian London, with gorgeous costumes and a cast of brilliant singers who are also terrific actors, led by the beautiful Fiona Campbell."

Hume opens her first season at Opera Queensland with Bach's *St Matthew Passion* (from 21 March) which she created for the 2005 Perth International Arts Festival and, to celebrate the bicentenary of the great composer Giuseppe Verdi, she will stage an international co-production of *Otello* (from 24 October) for the season finale, featuring Opera Australia soprano Cheryl Baker and Lithuanian tenor Kristian Benedikt.

Queensland Symphony Orchestra

Celebrating the move to its new home at South Bank, the Queensland Symphony Orchestra

(QSO) adds an extra string to its bow by venturing into the world of music from popular video games. *Video Games Unplugged - Symphony of Legends* (23 November) will feature music from some of the greatest games ever made, including *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, *Uncharted 3*, *Assassins Creed II* and *Final Fantasy VII*. A massive screen will show specially edited visual excerpts from the games at each performance.

Such a brave departure from purely classical music is not new for QSO which won accolades last year for its performance of the entire film score of *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, alongside a simultaneous screening of the movie, and already there is a wait list for tickets for this year's follow-up *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, coming in October.

It's demanding on the artists as principal trombonist Jason Redman knows all too well from *The Fellowship of the Ring* concert last year, a performance he calls a "chop killer". "There were three pages of music for the fight scene

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Cinderella two ways: performed by Opera Queensland (top) and Queensland Ballet (bottom)



Photography by Alexia Sinclair

inside the mountain that just kept getting higher and louder, and we had to play it four times in two days. My head was spinning from the sheer volume of air I was pumping out, and at the end of it all my lips felt like blistered and charred snags left on the barbecue for too long. This year, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* starts with the same music – bring it on!”

For QSO’s director of artistic planning, Richard Wenn, a personal highlight this year will be the return of piano virtuoso and Brisbane Festival 2012 favourite Nikolai Demidenko who will perform with QSO as part of the prestigious *Maestro Series* (which begins from 16 February). “This is one concert I am looking forward to,” says Wenn. “He is undoubtedly one of the top handful of pianists on this planet today and is unparalleled when performing *Rachmaninov’s Second Piano Concerto*. Demidenko’s control, passion and articulation makes him the perfect pianist to bring this concerto to the highest level.”

The *In Studio Series* begins 8 March with

works from leading Australian and international composers; the *Music On Sundays Series* starts from 24 March and compere Guy Noble’s witty and entertaining insights make these concerts a family-friendly introduction to classical music.

As a proud media supporter of Queensland Theatre Company *bmag* will feature an interview with the company’s artistic director Wesley Enoch and a preview of its program in the next issue, delivered from 19 February.

WHERE TO FIND MORE PROGRAM INFORMATION

Queensland Ballet
See www.queenslandballet.com.au

Opera Queensland
See www.operaq.com.au

Queensland Symphony Orchestra
See qso.com.au

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