

OPERA BLOCKBUSTERS *headed this way*

Brisbane expat Lyndon Terracini will bring two magic productions to the River City next year. Story by **Chris Herden**



Baz Luhrmann's opulent *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Take two world famous directors and two favourite operas, shorten and translate into English. Mix talented singers with lavish costumes and colourful sets, and you have the ingredients for a family-friendly season of opera designed to draw audiences of all ages.

That's exactly what Opera Australia (OA) has done for its long-awaited return to Brisbane – it's first season here in 24 years. "It's been a long time between drinks but I'm really happy it's finally worked out," says OA artistic director Lyndon Terracini, who will be staging two enchanting productions in Brisbane during May and June next year; Julie Taymor's *The Magic Flute* and Baz Luhrmann's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

"I think the fact that it is Julie Taymor's direction of *The Magic Flute* possibly will draw attention to it from people who have seen her acclaimed work in *The Lion King*," Terracini says of the innovative director and designer who won two Tony Awards

for the Broadway musical. "This is simply a spectacular production. Similarly, Baz Luhrmann is a wonderful director and this magical *Midsummer Night's Dream* production went to the Edinburgh Festival. It's a classic already and I think anyone who comes to see it will fall in love with it. The two of them directing operas is pretty unusual and the only time we are presenting these two operas in a season, and at the same time, is in Brisbane."

Terracini was instrumental in convincing the state and federal governments to fund the national opera company's return to Brisbane. The former CEO and artistic director of Major Brisbane Festivals and former artistic director of Queensland Music Festival has always been passionate about the creative scene in the Sunshine State and is known for engaging audiences.

"Both operas are designed for families and I think children and adults will love them both; it's part of us wanting to

connect to as many people as we possibly can," he says. "They're both in English, both really spectacular productions, much more than you would normally find. *The Magic Flute* is such an inspired production with puppets and flying giant birds."

When Taymor's *The Magic Flute* was first performed at the Metropolitan Opera in New York children were everywhere, a rare sight for such a venerable institution. *The New York Times* said the young audience was "remarkably attentive and well-behaved" and the charming and, at times, acrobatic baritone was the darling of every child in attendance.

Known for his visually stunning cinematic triumphs (*Moulin Rouge*, *Strictly Ballroom*, *Romeo and Juliet*) Baz Luhrmann's interpretation of Shakespearean fairies frolicking in the forest is set in India in the 1920s and features rustic acrobatic clowns and blue-skinned fairies as imagined by his Academy Award-winning wife, designer

Catherine Martin.

"Baz's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is now one of our favourites and is a favourite with audiences," Terracini says.

Terracini promises both operas are stunning visual and musical feasts. "Julie Taymor and Baz Luhrmann are two of the most important directors in the world," he says. "They are both incredibly imaginative and interested in communicating with an audience; they want people to love what they are seeing and hearing and these two productions reflect that."

The Brisbane-based performances at QPAC will also be simulcast live into five major regional centres across the state. "We would like to play to as many people in as many communities as possible. I think the simulcast is a great initiative to get more people interested in opera," Terracini says.

"There is tremendous excitement about coming to Brisbane and the company is very much looking forward to it."

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