

MEDIA RELEASE
23 January 2024

Australian talent to shine in *West Side Story* musical on Sydney Harbour



Opera Australia (OA) has announced that two exciting young Australian performers will lead the 2024 cast as Tony and Maria when its smash-hit musical production of *West Side Story* returns to the iconic Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour stage for a limited 4-week season, opening 22 March.

Award-winning First Nations soprano **Nina Korbe** will make her professional theatrical debut as Maria while Tony will be played by Canberra-born tenor **Billy Bouchier**, following his multi-city run in OA's highly acclaimed production of *Miss Saigon*.

Opera Australia's Artistic Director Jo Davies said "We are so excited to have these two fabulous Australian talents lead this production, audiences are going to be thrilled by their talent and energy on stage."

"We want to be an opera company for, and reflective of, 21st century Australia. The full cast, which we'll announce soon, features a diverse range of extraordinary talents drawn from both the opera and musical theatre worlds, who we know will brilliantly bring Bernstein's masterpiece to life," she said.

This electrifying, larger-than-life production of *West Side Story* premiered in 2019 to rapturous acclaim and remains the most successful of all Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour productions.

Featuring nightly fireworks and a live orchestra, and performed on Australia's largest outdoor stage with sweeping city and harbour views, Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour has become a quintessential Sydney cultural experience.

Nina Korbe is fiercely passionate about the representation of First Nations artists in the creative industries. She is a proud Koa, Kuku Yalanji, Wakka Wakka woman and actively involved in the championing of First Nations voices.

Nina recently joined Queensland Youth Orchestra as their Artist in Residence and Opera Queensland as a Young Artist. She has also performed in concert with Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and Queensland Symphony Orchestra.

She holds a Bachelor of Music in Performance from the Queensland Conservatorium and recently graduated from the Master of Arts program at the Royal Academy of Music in London. Nina is the recipient of the Harold Blair Opera Scholarship and the Ruskin Opera Scholarship with Melba Opera Trust.

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Billy Bouchier was first introduced to theatre in Canberra. After cutting his teeth in several productions in the local region, Billy relocated to Brisbane to study at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music, graduating in 2014 with Academic Excellence.

The role of Tony will mark Billy's lead role debut in a major musical directly following performances in the ensemble, and cover for Chris, in OA's acclaimed *Miss Saigon* at Sydney Opera House, Melbourne's Her Majesty's Theatre and Adelaide's Festival Theatre. Other previous credits include *Candide*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *Les Misérables* (Australia and International), *The Last Five Years* and *The Book of Mormon*.

Further to these productions, Billy has performed alongside the likes of Jemma Rix, John Foreman and The Queensland Symphony Orchestra and in 2020, Billy developed and performed in his own cabaret show *The Corner of Brisbane & Broadway*. Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour is supported by the NSW Government, via its tourism and major events agency Destination NSW, and through the International Foundation for Arts and Culture as Naming Rights Partner, Dr Haruhisa Handa OA's Patron in Chief, and OA's Principal Partner HSBC.

Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour – *West Side Story*: 22 March – 21 April 2024

Fleet Steps, Mrs Macquaries Point, Sydney

www.opera.org.au

Creatives

Director **Francesca Zambello**
 Set Designer **Brian Thomson AM**
 Costume Designer **Jennifer Irwin**
 Lighting Designer **John Rayment**
 Musical Director **Guy Simpson**
 Sound Designer **Des O'Neill**

Cast

Maria **Nina Korbe**
 Tony **Billy Bouchier**

WEST SIDE STORY

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Book by	Music by	Lyrics by
ARTHUR LAURENTS	LEONARD BERNSTEIN	STEPHEN SONDHEIM

Entire Original Production Directed and Choreographed by
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 By Arrangement with Roger L. Stevens
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