

Fact Sheet: Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour: *Aida*



In its short history, Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour has become the undisputed opera event of the year. Due to overwhelming success, this year Opera Australia has extended the season to four weeks with Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour: *Aida* running from 27 March to 26 April 2015.

The Nefertiti Head

- The feature piece of this year's Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour is the monumental Queen Nefertiti head. The giant sculpture is 18m tall and weighs 15 tonnes.
- Nefertiti is designed to be in a state of decay. Designer Mark Thompson was inspired by *Aida*'s original staging when it premiered in Egypt in 1871.
- The sculpture was six months in the making with elements produced in separate locations around the country.
- Nefertiti was transported by barge to its final destination at Mrs Macquarie's Point before being craned into position on the over-water stage and then fully configured on site.

Set Design & Construction

- *Aida* is the first Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour production to have a single designer for both the costume and stage.
- Working across the full spectrum of costumes, props, set and staging, Mark Thompson has collaborated with director Gale Edwards to bring the drama to life.
- The harbour stage is almost two and a half times larger than any other Australian indoor stage and measures 30m x 28m.
- The stage has no traditional backstage, wings or rigs, and has a 1:10 rake to ensure premium visibility for all guests. These aspects pose a unique challenge for design, production and performance.
- The performers access the stage via two ramps, or a floating walkway.
- The stage is partially built at White Bay and then trucked to Fleet Steps where it is built to completion. Here, two cranes lift the stage onto pylons in the water to create the seemingly floating stage.
- The construction and dressing of the temporary opera house takes 23 days with an average of 100 crew on site every day.
- More than 150 people have been involved in building the stage.
- The stage can support up to 150 tonne.
- The orchestra is housed directly beneath the stage, in an area affectionately known as "The Underworld".

Costume Design

- The production features almost 300 African-inspired costumes made from authentic Ethiopian fabrics.
- Each of the Ethiopian costumes are made of more than 20 metres of fabric.
- The costumes used a total of 600 metres of printed African fabric, and 400 metres of uniform fabric.
- The production features more than 2000 pieces of jewellery.
- The costumes are adorned with 300 hand-embroidered pieces of beadwork and badges.

The Site

- The temporary 'opera house' includes a 3,000 seat grandstand, five food and beverage venues, sparkling wine outlets, merchandise outlets, a box office, bathroom facilities and venue back-of-house facilities such as kitchens, dressing rooms and offices.
- Approximately 800 glasses of sparkling wine are estimated to be sold each night (that's more than 22,000 glasses over 28 performances).
- At this year's Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour, the flavours of North Africa and the Middle East come together in a range of themed menus designed to complement Verdi's Egyptian masterpiece.

The Opera

- For each performance, an average of 330 people are on site at the venue including cleaners, security, site management, front-of-house staff, orchestra, principal singers, chorus, actors, production crew, food and beverage staff and merchandise sellers and volunteers.
- Two Surf Life Savers keep a watch on the over water activities of construction workers, performers and staff.
- The performances of *Aida* also feature live camels who will appear for the Triumphal March in every performance.
- Each performance of *Aida* features much anticipated fireworks that will illuminate the stage and Sydney Harbour throughout the season.
- Over 200 hours of rehearsal time go into the production.
- There is a total performing company of 146, including 96 cast members and 50 from The Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra.
- 223 speakers carry the music into the night air.
- 600 lighting fixtures are used on the site and back of house.
- 220 lights illuminate the production.
- 65km of power, audio and data cables are in use.

Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour

- *Aida* was secured by the NSW Government through its tourism and major events agency Destination NSW. Destination NSW has supported Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour since 2012.
- This event will be the first production in a new three year agreement between the NSW Government and Opera Australia, to stage Opera on Sydney Harbour.
- Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour has attracted more than 11,300 overseas and interstate visitors to Sydney since 2012 and has delivered up to \$20 million in visitor expenditure to the NSW economy during this time.
- The International Foundation for Arts and Culture (IFAC) was founded by Dr Haruhisa Handa in 1996 as a not-for-profit organisation to support arts, cultural and educational programs around the globe. Dr Handa believes that the arts are an extremely powerful tool for good, capable of bridging borders and uniting cultures. IFAC supports talented performers and musicians around the world to enhance global exchange and understanding.

Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour: *Aida* will run from 27 March to 26 April 2015.

Tickets are now on sale, prices start at \$79. Dining and travel packages available.

www.opera.org.au

MEDIA RESOURCES: Download broadcast quality footage of Nefertiti's journey to the Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour stage http://opera.org.au/aboutus/media_centre