

OPERA AUSTRALIA BENEVOLENT FUND CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2014

After 34 years, the number of requests for assistance continues to confirm the importance of the existence of the Opera Australia Benevolent Fund. In the last 12 months some of our members and their dependents have experienced hardship beyond their ability to manage alone and I'm pleased to say that the Fund has been able to assist most of them. Although the number of requests has remained comparatively low, the amounts involved have increased significantly.

As I did last year, I would like to thank our all my fellow trustees, for their creativity, sensitivity and quick responses to emails when requests for assistance have been made. Thanks in particular to General Secretary Li Li Fisher and Minutes Secretary Stuart Maunder, who has continued in the role from as far away as NZ. Honorary Treasurer Ann Wang is still balancing the books and our investment subcommittee Sue Olden and Anson Austin are continuing to monitor our investments with as much success as the financial climate will allow. Thank you. As vacancies arose, we also welcomed new trustees Jonathan McCauley and Sandra Willis. Sandra attends meetings from Melbourne via OA's net-based video link. We are very grateful to the company for allowing us to take advantage of that technology.

Recently we have found a great supporter in Matthew Leech of Evalesco Financial Services. Matt has volunteered to come on board to help steer some of our beleaguered colleagues through a mire of financial difficulties. His guidance has led to the Fund either having to assist at a much reduced level than originally thought or not at all. And he has done it without charge.

On the 19th of January the Benevolent Fund and Opera Australia sponsored a celebration of the life of trustee Bob Allman, who died in early December. Organized principally by former trustee Moffatt Oxenbould, it was a packed and fitting tribute to a wonderful artist and man. Bob was the last of the inaugural trustees and made a mightily significant contribution to the Fund throughout his trusteeship. The concerts he organized for many years with the Australian Golf Club netted tens of thousands of dollars for the Fund. Even when his health was failing he made every effort to attend meetings and contribute to the discussions with his very special brand of wit based on down-to-earth wisdom and true compassion. I'd like to acknowledge Bob's wife Jo, who made a significant donation to the Fund following the memorial celebration.

Beyond our members' subscriptions and the interest we earn on our investments, supplementary fund-raising now comes principally from bucket collections at rehearsals and performances. We are grateful to the OA management for allowing us to collect at main stage generals once a year in Sydney and Melbourne. The run of *South Pacific* in several cities proved to be a lucrative bonus source for us. We thank Holly Buchanan for organizing the collections and we look forward to working with the management team of *The King and I* this year.

Yet again I would like to formally thank all of you and your colleagues for maintaining your fortnightly contributions. The two dollars per fortnight deduction is the minimum. If any member feels that they are able to contribute more, we will be happy to accept their generosity. Every little helps.

Finally, as I do every year, I'd like to remind you that the Fund is there for you in times of genuine hardship. Be assured that any request that satisfies the guidelines as set out in the Fund's Trust Deed will be treated discretely and expediently.

Dr Robert Mitchell, Chairman 2014