

# **The Musicians of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra**

1 Davey Street  
Hobart  
Tasmania  
7000

11 September 2020

PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister Fletcher,

I am writing to you on behalf of the musicians of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra (TSO) to address the ongoing situation with our colleagues in the Opera Australia Orchestra (OAO).

The musicians of the TSO stand with our colleagues in OAO in our condemnation of the move by Opera Australia (OA) management to make forced redundancies.

The Opera Australia Orchestra is a world-class and internationally renowned ensemble. They are the house orchestra of Australia's most significant and most recognisable cultural site. While the Opera House is currently sitting silent, due to the unprecedented events of 2020, it will one day welcome domestic and international visitors again into its halls. Within these concert halls and theatres, Australian artists can stand proud and showcase the cultural wealth of this nation. As you will be aware, all great organisations from political parties to sports teams to opera companies, rely upon great people. These organisations benefit from the expertise and corporate knowledge of their employees. The OAO is no different to any other organisation that relies on teamwork. The success of Opera Australia, as the preeminent arts organisation in Australia, is reliant upon having a dedicated orchestra of permanent, expert, opera musicians in OAO. Any move to cut this expert orchestral team or to further casualise the workforce would destroy the threads of expertise that wind their way through the company. It would destroy the very thing that makes the company great. By their proposed course of action, OA management is posing a significant risk to the future of world-class art in this world-class structure.

The musicians of OAO through their representation at SOMA (Symphony Orchestra Musicians Association) and the MEAA (Media, Entertainment & Arts, Alliance) have sought to engage in dialogue with the company management to prevent needless job losses. The musicians of the TSO know, through our own

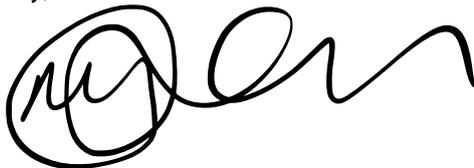
experience in 2020, that active discussion founded on respect is the only way to move forward in a mutually beneficial manner. We have been able to do great things at the TSO by having musicians and management working hand in hand to overcome the hurdles thrown at us during 2020. We wholeheartedly stand behind the efforts of the players of the OAO, and the representation through SOMA and MEAA, to offer productive solutions to the situation facing them. We urge you to encourage the management of OA to engage in constructive discussions with their musicians to ensure that when the time comes, we can again hear the world-class sounds of a full and complete OAO fill those hallowed sails of the Sydney Opera House.

We would also encourage you to find the appropriate financial resources to assist Opera Australia, and by extension OAO, through this challenging time. There has been little movement on the distribution of funds announced by your government many months ago. The delay in providing emergency relief by your government is unconscionable.

The truth of the arts in Australia is that organisations like OA are part of an ecosystem. As a large and culturally rich organisation OA, and the musicians of OAO, feed the musical life of Sydney far beyond the reaches of the Opera House grounds. Each year OAO employs and educates musicians that go on to teach within their communities. These musicians foster and enrich the cultural life of communities right across Sydney and indeed the entire nation. Many of us in the TSO have grown up listening to, learning from, and performing with the musicians of the OAO. We know that the impact of the musicians of the OAO goes far beyond the sails of the Opera House in shaping the cultural life of thousands of Australians.

The cultural life and heritage of our nation depends upon the health and success of our arts institutions, and OA sits chief amongst our most important and irreplaceable. It is therefore imperative that you as minister do everything you can to ensure that OA and OAO survive the devastating effects of the forced government shutdowns of live performance in the COVID-19 era. It is only with a thriving Opera company, in name and fabric, that Australia can genuinely claim to have a rich cultural ecosystem.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MN', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Mitchell Nissen

*President of the Players Association of the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra  
BMus (Hons), Sydney Conservatorium of Music  
MMus, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois  
Principal Bass Trombone, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra*