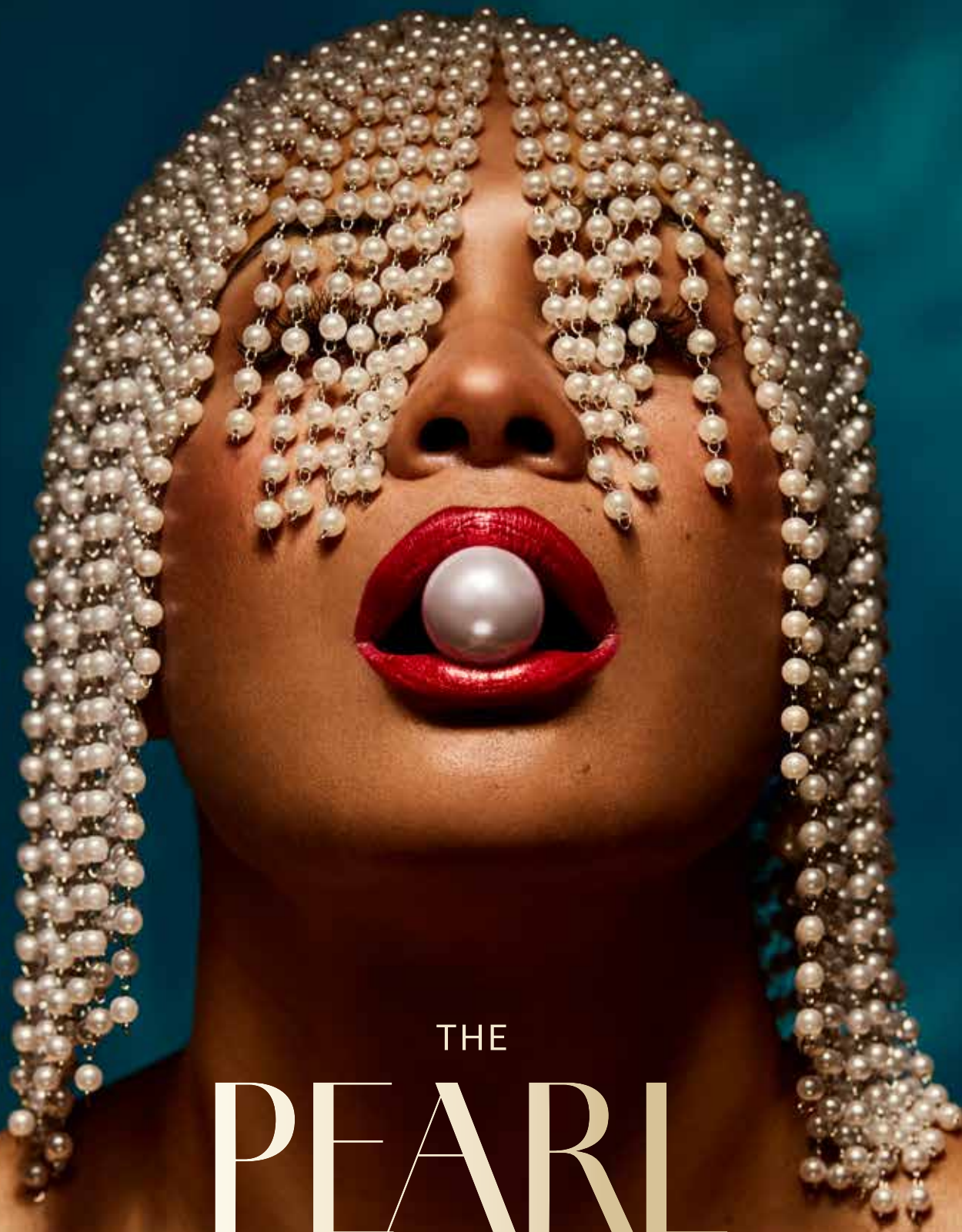


NZOPERA



THE
PEARL
FISHERS

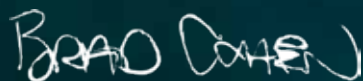
Tēnā koutou katoa,

and thank you for joining us for this special season of The Pearl Fishers.

This is a timely moment to bring *The Pearl Fishers* to our audiences in Aotearoa. I have always been awestruck by Bizet's extraordinary music in this opera which – as critical editor of the score – I know intimately and admire beyond words. It's remarkable to consider Bizet was only 24 when he wrote it; with *Carmen* still a decade away, the emotional world of this opera is exceptionally mature. His innate understanding of the human voice, his gifts as a melodist and orchestrator, and his capacity for raw emotional power are already fully evident.

I am convinced that Bizet's vision was to tell a mythic story of love, loyalty, and betrayal – a fundamentally human and universal tale – which he created in spite of the tired 19th century libretto he was provided with. It has been our plan, together with our distinguished creative team led by Stephen Barlow and Yannis Thavoris, to create a thoughtful reframing which allows the inner power of this work to shine. We hope you enjoy this distinctively new production of *The Pearl Fishers*.

Tēnā koutou katoa, and thank you for joining us.



Brad Cohen

Tumu Whakarae

General Director of New Zealand Opera



Tuia ki te rangi, tuia ki te whenua,
tuia ki te moana.

Ka rongo te pō, ka rongo te ao.

Ko te mauri o nuku,

ko te mauri o rangi,

ko te mauri ka puta ki te whaiao,

ki te ao mārama.

Tihei mauri ora!

Bind the sky, bind the earth, bind the sea.

The night hears, the day hears.

This is the life force of the earth,

this is the life force of the heavens.

It is the life force that emerges

from the darkness and the unknown,

into the light and understanding.

Thus, the breath of life!

THE PEARL FISHERS

Composer

Georges Bizet

Librettist

Eugène Cormon & Michel Carré

Sung in French with English surtitles

Duration approximately 2 hours and 20 minutes including a 20 minute interval

NGĀ KAIWHAKAARI | CAST

Léïla

Madison Nonoa

Nadir

Filipe Manu

Zurga

Samuel Dundas

Nourabad

Anthony Robin Schneider

Young Zurga

Oscar Wang (A), Yiting Su (C)

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Conductor

Benjamin Bayl

Director

Stephen Barlow

Set & Costume Designer

Yannis Thavoris

Lighting Designer

Jake Wiltshire

English Translation

Alasdair Middleton

Assistant Director

Brock Roberts

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Patrice Kay Hammond (C)

Surtitles Operator

Iona Taylor

AV Technician

Abe Fisher – Illuminati NZ

Chaperones

Carla Parry, Zachary Te Maari (A),

Maezee Burgess (C)

Les Pêcheurs de perles (The Pearl Fishers). Composed by Georges Bizet and edited by Brad Cohen. Published by Peters Edition Limited. By kind permission of the Wise Music Group.

SPECIAL THANKS

New Zealand Opera would like to acknowledge

Nicola Owen – Audio Described Aotearoa; Pixel – AV; Audio Visual Equipment supplied by ILLUMINATI-NZ; Lighting Equipment supplied by Grouse Lighting; Hugh Glaser – contexts.live; Gaby Solomona; Sacha Stejko, campaign photography; Wanda Tambrin; Fiona Li; Mariya Kaganskaya and Marcie Stapp

Supported by Isaac Theatre Royal

Ngā Tuhinga a Te Kaihautū me Te Kaihoahoa |

Director & Designer's Notes

Les Pêcheurs de perles: The Pearl within the Oyster?

Bizet's shimmering 19th century opera *Les Pêcheurs de perles* (*The Pearl Fishers*), composed when he was just 24 years old, contains one of the most famous pieces of music in the entire operatic repertoire. Yet just underneath the surface lurks a 21st century challenge – how to triangulate a supposedly Ceylonese setting with an original libretto demonstrating colonial attitudes to both race and (Hindu) religion, as well as very antiquated male attitudes about women and chastity.

A problem, but also an opportunity.

Brad Cohen, General Director of NZ Opera, knows Bizet's opera probably better than anyone alive today, having prepared a new critical edition of the score in 2002 which now has become the standard performing edition of the piece worldwide. Brad feels strongly that whilst the libretto and the setting of *The Pearl Fishers* are indeed problematic, Bizet's music is not; that Bizet used the opportunity he was given to compose a mythic, Wagnerian score of passion in spite of, not because of, the poor-quality libretto he was provided with. Therefore, Brad invited us to revisit the piece along with a view to reframing it for a 21st century audience.

*... we tell a parable about
the ruthlessness of Western
powerbrokers today where
transgressors to the cult are
executed publicly.*

Yannis and I have created over 30 new opera productions together since 2008 and with *The Pearl Fishers* we started by simply stripping the story to its bare bones – a three-hander tale about two men, very close friends, in love with

the same woman. We were reminded of one of the greatest films of all time – *Casablanca* – where Humphrey Bogart and Paul Henreid compete for the affections of Ingrid Bergman against the shifting sands of the 1940s Second World War. We knew we had to be bold in our reimagining but also careful not to 'throw the baby out with the bathwater'. Indeed, water, especially the ocean, is an important ingredient in this opera regardless of how you 'cut and dice' the material. So we decided to transpose the Ceylonese fishing community of



... beautiful people do ugly things in a dystopian paradise...

yesteryear to a contemporary coastal resort and spa called *The White Pearl*. This is an obvious wink to an iconic TV series that we both love and where, as in this opera, beautiful people do ugly things in a dystopian paradise but the TV show is not essential viewing to appreciate our interpretation.

At our resort the top tier management of a luxury jewellery brand, *Pêcheur & Perle* (see what we did there?!), have gathered for their annual immersive, deep dive 'Brand Awareness Retreat'.





THE PEARL FISHERS
NEW ZEALAND OPERA



yannis-thavoris.com



Photo credit: Thomas Hamill

Zurga becomes the Director of Brand Strategy, Nadir a former Creative Director of the company who returns to the fold and Léila, the mysterious celebrity, pop singer mascot and voice of the brand. The origins of the brand and the launch of its new collection have been incorporated into our telling of the story.

In making these changes we have inverted the story completely – rather than a fantasy about ancient times, we tell a parable about the ruthlessness of Western powerbrokers today where transgressors to the cult are executed publicly. We leave the location of our coastal resort non-specific, rather than depicting a traditional Ceylonese (Sri Lankan) setting. Similarly, there is no real-world religious mimicry in this staging. The world of luxury branding becomes its own secular faith, exploring the intense devotion modern culture places on wealth, influence, and exclusivity.

The design of our interpretation leans into the familiar, international style of 5-star hotels and resorts – sleek surfaces studded with palm trees and ocean vistas. We also subliminally reference the pearl within the oyster trope with our oval cyclorama (the large tapestry positioned at the back of the stage) containing a circular portal that doubles as both an entrance to the resort and Léila's temple in the second act.

Of course, no reinterpretation of *The Pearl Fishers*, whether radical or otherwise, will be a perfect solution because the original libretto is famously flawed. Even the two people who wrote it – Michel Carré and Eugène Cormon – conceded, upon hearing Bizet's glorious music: "If we had known he was this talented we would have done a better job!"

We hope you appreciate our new setting of Bizet's antique gem.

Stephen Barlow, Director
Yannis Thavoris, Set & Costume Designer

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Benjamin Bayl
CONDUCTOR

Benjamin Bayl is an internationally renowned conductor equally active in the orchestral and operatic fields. An alumnus of London's Royal Academy of Music and National Opera Studio, he was mentored by Iván Fischer and John Eliot Gardiner. He co-founded the Australian Romantic & Classical Orchestra, and was Associate Director of the Hanover Band.

Benjamin has conducted major orchestras throughout Europe and Australasia, including concerts with the Melbourne, Sydney, Queensland, Hong Kong, Warsaw, Iceland and Aarhus Symphony Orchestras. On the opera podium, Benjamin has led productions at many celebrated houses worldwide including the Wiener Staatsoper, Dutch National Opera, Staatsoper Berlin, Royal Danish Opera and Opera Australia.

Proudly supported by Bill Falconer CNZM



Stephen Barlow
DIRECTOR

Stephen was born and educated in Melbourne, Australia and has directed over 50 productions for many of the world's leading opera companies including Santa Fe Opera, the Royal Ballet & Opera, The Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Glyndebourne Festival, San Francisco Opera, Théâtre du Capitole Toulouse and Opéra de Monte Carlo.

His recent work includes: *Flight* with State Opera South Australia, Scottish Opera, Opera Holland Park; *Don Giovanni* at Santa Fe, *Marx in London* with Scottish Opera; *Tosca*, *Itch* with Opera Holland Park; *The Barber of Seville* with Santa Fe & Grange Festival; *Roméo et Juliette* with Estonian National Opera; *The Phantom of the Opera* in Bucharest, Oslo, Athens, UAE; *La Cenerentola* at Grange Festival; *Così fan tutte* at Central City Opera, Colorado; *Madama Butterfly* with Danish National Opera; and *Suor Angelica* and *Gianni Schicchi* in Hong Kong.

Other productions include *Rigoletto* with Lyric Opera Chicago, Bucharest National Opera; *La Rondine* with The Metropolitan Opera, Théâtre du Capitole Toulouse; *Carmen* with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis; *La Cour de Célimène* at Wexford Festival and *La traviata* with Singapore Lyric Opera.



Yannis Thavoris
SET & COSTUME DESIGNER

Yannis Thavoris graduated with a diploma in Architecture from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece in 1995. He then obtained a Master of Arts in European Scenography at the Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design. He was winner of the 1997 Linbury Prize for Stage Design.

Recent designs include *La finta giardiniera* for the Royal College of Music; *Carmen* for the Royal Academy of Music; *Taj Mahal* for Grange Park Opera; *The Turn of the Screw* for USA's Spoleto Festival; *Don Giovanni* for Santa Fe Opera; *Suor Angelica* for English National Opera; *Marx in London!* for Scottish Opera; *Mansfield Park* for Royal Northern College of Music; *Hänsel and Gretel* for Royal College of Music; *Viva la Diva* for Salzburger Landestheater; *Roméo et Juliette* for Estonian National Opera; *Orlando* for San Francisco Opera; *Roberto Devereux* (sets) for Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe and *Otello* for Theater Magdeburg.

Also *Tosca* for Nederlandse Reisopera and Santa Fe Opera; *Cendrillon* for Royal Northern College of Music; *L'elisir d'amore* for Den Jyske Opera; *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Sibelius Academy; *La finta giardiniera* for Buxton Festival; *Ariodante*, *The Lady from the Sea* and *Madama Butterfly* for Scottish Opera and *Rigoletto* for National Opera Bucharest.



Jake Wiltshire

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Jake designs extensively both in the UK and worldwide. His work has been seen with major opera companies and festivals including the Royal Opera House, Welsh National Opera, Opera North, Savonlinna Opera Festival, Oper Leipzig, Garsington Opera and St. Galler Festspiele, as well as many of the UK's top music conservatoires. Internationally, he has worked throughout Europe, North America, and Asia in a variety of venues from traditional proscenium arch theatres to unique site-specific spaces. In 2009 he was made an Honorary Associate of the Royal Academy of Music (HonARAM) and in 2023 he was nominated for a Canadian Dora Mavor Moore Award for outstanding lighting design.

Recent credits include lighting *Il Viaggio a remis* for Oper Leipzig, *Susanna* for Opera North, a co-production of *L'Olimpiade* between the Royal Opera House, Irish National Opera and Fribourg Nouvel Opera, *The Magic Flute* and *Don Pasquale* for Welsh National Opera, *Peter Pan* for Haydn Fondazione, *The Cunning Little Vixen* for Silent Opera in association with English National Opera, (in London, Helsinki, Trento, Hong Kong and Beijing) and *Bluebeard's Castle* for Theatre of Sound (in London, Atlanta, Beijing, Toronto, Edmonton and New Zealand) which won the Royal Philharmonic Society Award.

Jake has also lit multiple productions for Buxton International Opera Festival, Longborough Festival Opera and Opera Holland Park.



Brock Roberts

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Brock Roberts is an international director and producer working in opera and musical theatre.

He has had the delight of working in the USA, Germany, UK, Malta, the United Arab Emirates, Singapore, Australia and now New Zealand.

Brock's directing credits include *Norma* in concert for State Opera South Australia; *Ride the Cyclone* for Singapore's LASALLE College of Arts; *Class of Cabaret* for Adelaide Cabaret Festival; *Listen to My Story* for Co-Opera, Adelaide; *Alice Through the Opera Glass* for Victorian Opera, Melbourne; *Carmen* for Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod; *Venus and Adonis*, *Actéon* for the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire; *Orpheus in the Underworld* for Malta's Teatru Manoel; *To Himself, Alone* for Tête à Tête: Opera Festival London; *Into the Woods* for the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Cardiff and as Associate Director, *Tosca* for Abu Dhabi Festival. He has also been the Assistant Director on *Parsifal* with Victorian Opera; *Act III Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* with State Opera South Australia; *Ava's Wedding* for Royal Birmingham Conservatoire; *The Phantom of the Opera* for G&S Society of South Australia; *Tosca* for Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod and *Werther* for London's Royal Ballet and Opera.

Brock is currently the Creative Producer at State Opera South Australia.

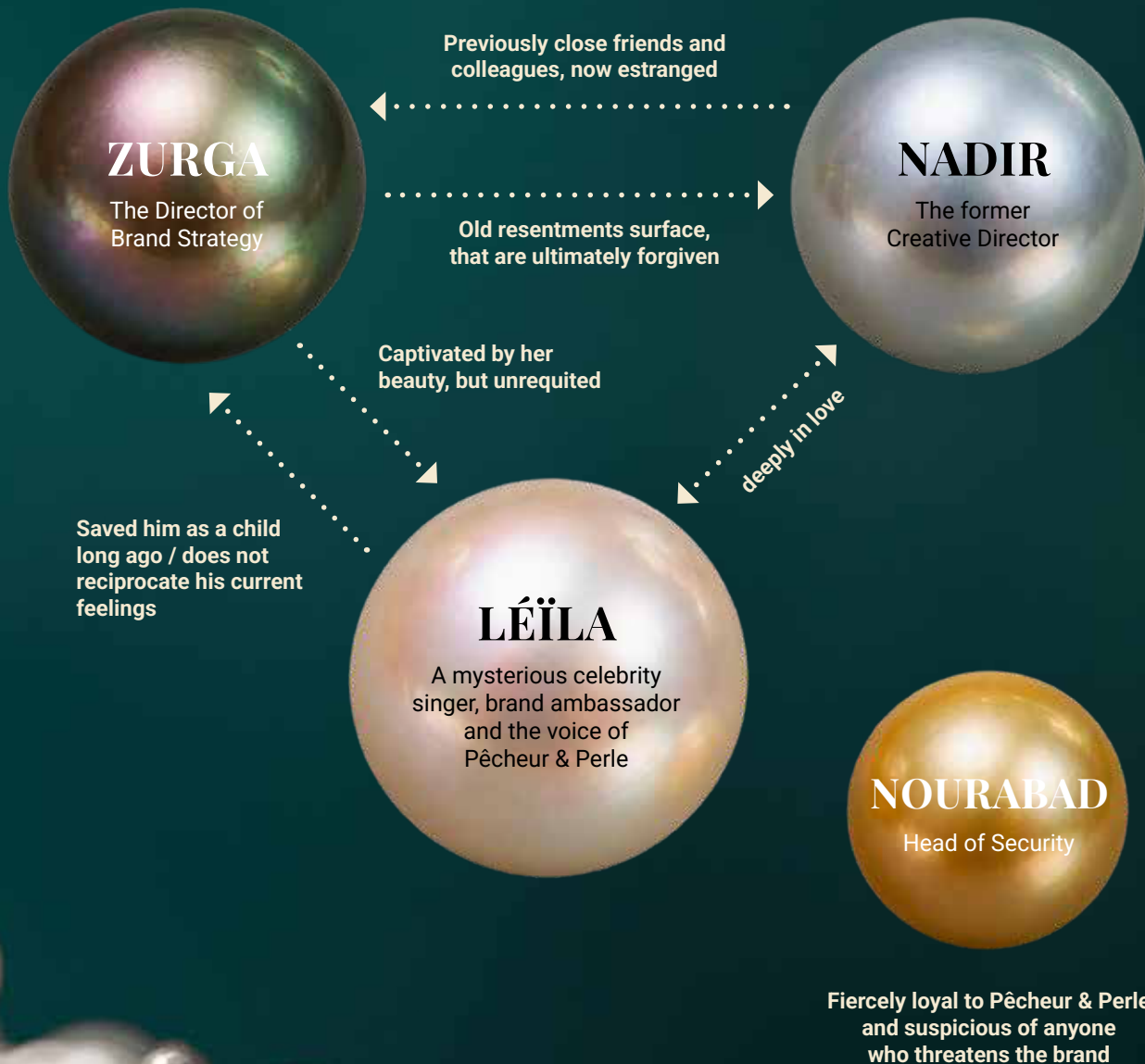


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The Pearl Fishers in rehearsal



Ngā Kaiwhakaari | *Cast*



Madison Nonoa LÉILA

New Zealand soprano Madison Nonoa holds a master's degree in music from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama where she studied under Yvonne Kenny. Since graduating in 2019, Madison has made her debut at the Glyndebourne Festival Opera as First Siren in *Rinaldo* and was selected as a 2020/21 Jerwood Young Artist for the Festival. Madison was named a Samling Artist in 2020, a Britten-Pears Young Artist for 2021/22, and is a former Dame Malvina Major Emerging Young Artist with NZ Opera, where she made her debut as Papagena in *The Magic Flute*. She was Dame Malvina Major Award Winner 2024, and in 2025, she received the Dame Heather Begg Memorial Award.

Career highlights for Madison have included her festival debuts at the Salzburg and Whitsun Festivals, performing as Amore in *Orfeo ed Euridice* with Cecilia Bartoli and Gianluca Capuano, and her house and role debut as the title role in *Dido and Aeneas* for the Ustinov Studio at the Theatre Royal Bath.

Other recent operatic engagements include her festival debut as Maria in *West Side Story* and Galatea in *Polifemo* for Opera du Rhin; Papagena in *The Magic Flute* at Glyndebourne, and her role debut as Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* for Aix-en-Provence Festival 2025.

Madison acknowledges the ongoing support of the Dame Kiri Te Kanawa and Dame Malvina Major Foundations.

Proudly supported by the Ryman Healthcare Dame Malvina Major Foundation Mina Foley Award



Andrew Goodwin NADIR

Tenor Andrew Goodwin has performed leading roles with the Bolshoi Opera, Gran Theatre Liceu Barcelona, Teatro Real Madrid, La Scala Milan, Opera Australia, Pinchgut Opera and Sydney Chamber Opera.

He has appeared with the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra, the Moscow and Melbourne Chamber Orchestras and is regularly invited by all the Australian Symphony orchestras. Andrew has given recitals at Wigmore Hall, Oxford Lieder and major festivals around Australia.

Andrew's performances this year include recitals at Bendigo and Orange Chamber Music and Queensland Artsong Festivals, Melbourne Bach Choir (Evangelist, St. Matthew Passion), Sydney Philharmonia Choirs (Creation), West Australian Symphony (Steuermann, *The Flying Dutchman*), Sydney Symphony (Mozart's Requiem) and Tasmanian and Bendigo Symphony and St. Peter's Adelaide (Messiah).

His recordings include Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin*, *Winterreise* and *When yesterday we met* (songs of Rachmaninov and Tchaikovsky) for ABC Classics with his long-time recital partner Daniel de Borah, and *Artaxerxes*, *Giasone*, *L'ámant jaloux* and *L'anima del filosofo* with Pinchgut Opera.

Born in Sydney, Andrew studied voice at the St. Petersburg Conservatory and in the UK with Robert Dean. He has also received support from the Australian Music Foundation and ARS Musica Australis.

Proudly supported by The Canterbury Opera Foundation



Samuel Dundas ZURGA

Samuel Dundas, a graduate of the Melba Conservatorium of Music and winner of the Lady Fairfax New York Scholarship and Dame Heather Begg Award, has been a member of Victorian Opera's Developing Artist Program, Opera Australia's Moffatt Oxenbould Young Artist Program and is a former member of the vocal faculty at Hobart Conservatorium of Music.

Featured major role debuts this year are Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly* and Figaro in *The Barber of Seville* for Opera Australia, title role in *Eugen Onegin* for West Australian Opera, Nerone in *The Coronation of Poppea* for Victorian Opera, and Gunther in *Götterdämmerung* for Sydney Symphony. Samuel has also recently been heard as Dandini in *La Cenerentola* and Enrico in *Lucia di Lammermoor* for Opera Queensland, Dr Falke in *Die Fledermaus* for West Australian Symphony and as Marcello in *La bohème* for NZ Opera and Opera Queensland.

Samuel has also appeared as Horatio in Hamlet and Wolfram in *Tannhäuser* for Opera Australia, the Count in *Capriccio* for Victorian Opera, Donner in *Das Rheingold* for Sydney Symphony Orchestra and the title role in Richard Mills' opera *Galileo*, for Victorian Opera.

His repertoire on the concert platform ranges from Mozart, Fauré and Brahms Requiems to Beethoven Symphony No.9 and *Carmina Burana*.

Proudly supported by the Friedlander Foundation



Anthony Robin Schneider

NOURABAD

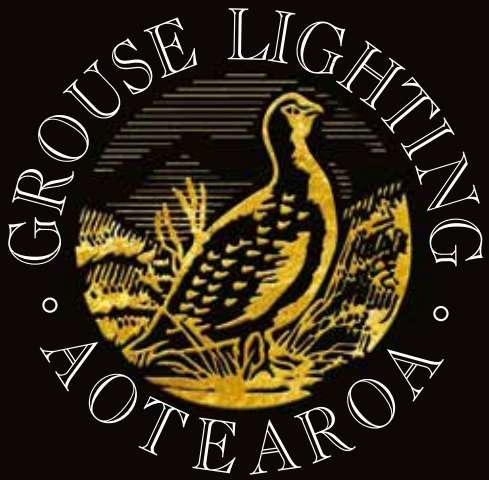
Bass Anthony Robin Schneider has appeared with leading opera companies and orchestras worldwide, including Santa Fe Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Wiener Staatsoper, Semperoper Dresden, Dutch National Opera, Festspielhaus Baden-Baden, the Cleveland Orchestra, and the Berliner Philharmoniker.

In the 2025/26 season, he appears as Méphistophélès in *Faust* at the Concertgebouw, Sarastro in *The Magic Flute* at Semperoper Dresden and Theater Basel, and Bartolo in *The Marriage of Figaro* at Dutch National Opera, Tiresias in *Oedipus Rex* at Teatro Comunale Bolzano, Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* in Pisa, Rossini's *Stabat Mater* in London, and Verdi's *Requiem* at the Dresden Music Festival.

Last season he returned to Oper Frankfurt for Barrie Kosky's revival of *Hercules* (title role) and made debuts with Canadian Opera Company in *Wozzeck* (Doctor) and North Carolina Opera in *Ernani* (Don Ruy Gomez de Silva).

A graduate of the Houston Grand Opera Studio and the Academy of Vocal Arts, he was a national semifinalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and a recipient of a Kiri Te Kanawa Foundation Scholarship. Trilingual in German, French, and English, he holds dual Austrian and New Zealand citizenship.

Proudly supported by Dame Jenny Gibbs DNZM



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Cadenza

Bill Falconer CNZM*
The Friedlander Foundation*
Dame Jenny Gibbs DNZM*

Aria

Anna Gibbons
Wilson McGechan Trust*

Duet

Anonymous 1
Dr Raewyn Dalziel
Sir Roderick & Gillian, Lady Deane*
Alfons & Susie des Tombe*
Chanelle & Dean Farmer
Trevor & Jan Farmer*
Clare French
Joy Gray & Robin Hilson
John & Annabel Holland

John & Margaret Hunn*
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& Ian Fraser OBE
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Noel Vautier & Kerrin Vautier CMG*
Mrs Linda Webb MNZM &
Mr Warwick Webb
Gael Webster & Tim Brown

Trio

Anonymous 1
Alison Buchanan & Eric Johnston
Rosslyn Caughey
Susan Doig
Steph Dyhrberg & Murray Bell
Cathy Ferguson & Mike During*
Nick Francis & Stephanie van Leuven
Helen Gaeta
Michael & Creena Gibbons*
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Geoff & Fran Ricketts*

Quartet

Anonymous 3
Sally & Euan Abernethy
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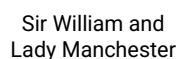
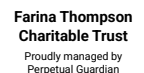
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