

POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA IN OPERA

1. Background

THE POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA IN OPERA, being a one-year full-time course, will replace the current three-year part-time Graduate Diploma offered through the VCA School of Music. Like the latter, it will offer education and training to student singers, répétiteurs and conductors but will also extend that opportunity to aspiring opera directors, providing an educational basis for developing leadership qualities. It will also broaden a student's knowledge base by offering more course subjects to address the needs of a profession demanding an array of symbiotic skills.

It will solve a fundamental Teaching and Learning problem, inherent in the current part-time program, by introducing Principal Study. This will obviate the difficulty of providing teaching in solo repertoire in a group situation, as is the case currently. A previous external advisory panel drew attention to this defect, benchmarked against other educational establishments in Australia and overseas.

Commencing Semester 2 2005. This is timed to coincide with academic years overseas. A precedent has been set by Swinburne University, currently advertising courses commencing mid-year. Part of the course will be taught in intensive mode, modeling the structure on professional conditions and utilizing times when the VCA premises will be less congested.

The Postgraduate Diploma in Opera has been designed to enable students to engage in a more intensive program at a more consistent entry level than the current Graduate Diploma and also opens the way for international students to enrol in a recognized opera course in Victoria. The new course will continue the reputation for innovation, collaboration, self-discipline, motivation, and expertise enjoyed by the current program and embraced by the College's operational plan but its more intensive schedule and its attention to the needs of the individual will provide a steeper learning curve.

Directors such as Barry Kosky, Lindy Hume and Caroline Stacey are increasingly making their careers in opera and serve as models for the younger generation of aspiring directors. The course will provide them with a formal framework and excellent Teaching and Learning.

Demand

The course addresses the needs of an international cohort of aspiring opera practitioners: our traditional clients from Melbourne, regional Victoria and interstate and potentially opera-loving countries such as Korea (with an estimated 30,000 singers currently studying in Italy) Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and New Zealand. The part-time course did not permit these students enrolling in the course. The Head of Opera has had, over the years, expressions of interest from Asian, German and even American students but was unable to offer them opera education.

Tradition

The VCA feels an obligation to continue its tradition of opera training, which evinces a direct lineage back to the National Opera School of Gertrude Johnson. That school produced artists of the calibre of Robert Allman, Joan Carden, Gregory Dempsey and launched the careers of conductors, directors and designers. The tradition is recognized in the artistic community but the feeling exists that three years of part-time study is (a) too protracted within the timetable (only three evenings per week) for sustained development and (b) a bar to seizing opportunities to audition and gain professional experience over too long a period, in an increasingly competitive environment.

External environment: National and International Connections

Whilst opera in Australia has experienced growth and recession, there have always been resurgent cycles. It is in no small measure due to the constant training opportunities which have brought about multi-skilled practitioners using their skills in performance, education and audience development, as well as in the wider community. Besides the opportunities given by National and State companies, there exist OzOpera's Schools project, More Than Opera Education works for children and work in schools and cancer therapy program.

Notwithstanding the demise of the Victoria State Opera, opera activity continues in Melbourne with nine companies producing work at every level including Mainstage (Opera Australia, Melbourne Opera, Melbourne City Opera), Avant-garde (Chamber Made, Operalive) and community (More than Opera, OzOpera).

Other courses in Australia

Whilst Melbourne University, Monash and Melba Conservatorium do offer some components of opera training in their vocal courses, the VCA has always offered a program specialized opera training and is the only course in Melbourne which trains repetiteurs. There is currently no designated training course for opera directors.

Institute	Course	Fees
Sydney Conservatorium	Diploma of Opera – 3 yrs f/t	HECS
Sydney Conservatorium	Grad Dip Mus (opera) – 1 yr f/t (singers, repetiteurs)	\$7K (Aus) 15K (int)
Sydney Conservatorium	Mperf (opera) 2 yrs f/t (singers/repetiteurs)	?
Queensland Conservatorium	Grad Dip Mus (opera perf) – 1 yr f/t or 2 yrs p/t	HECs (Aus), \$16,280 (int)
Elder Conservatorium	Some opera training incorporated into Bmus	
ANU Sch of Music	Some opera training incorporated into Bmus	
Hobart	Some opera training incorporated into Bmus	
WAAPA (Perth)	Some opera training incorporated into Bmus	
Australian Opera Studio (Perth)	Private institute, sponsored (\$1 million p.a.) by businessman. 2 yrs f/t	No fees
ANAM (Melbourne)	Intensive vocal training for short periods, including opera studies. No academic degree or diploma offered.	No fees. Students receive stipend

External Course Advisory Committee

On May 26, 2004, The Postgraduate course was subjected to the scrutiny of an external Course Advisory Committee, including

- Richard Gill (Opera conductor and educationalist. Artistic Director, OzOpera - Opera Australia)
- Suzanne Johnston (Graduate, VCA Opera, and established international opera artist)
- Merlyn Quaife (Melbourne University: Head of Vocal Studies, Faculty of Music)
- Caroline Stacey Opera and stage Director, Artistic Director, Castlemaine State Festival

The proposal has had written encouragement from

- Anthony Legge (Senior Lecturer, Royal Academy of Music, London – formerly Head of Music, English National Opera)
- Gordon Ostrowski (Director, Opera Department, Manhattan School of Music, New York)

2. Entry Requirements

Eligibility

1. The Selection Committee will evaluate the applicant's ability to pursue successfully the course using the following criteria –
 - A three year undergraduate degree, or equivalent in the study of opera or opera related subjects; or
 - 5 years of documented, professional opera experience

Selection

2. The Selection Committee may conduct interviews for each short listed applicant and may call for referees reports and employer references in order to elucidate any of the matters referred to above.

3. Course Structure

The course is structured for study of one-year full time, in two semesters, scheduled to commence mid-year, 2005.

Students enrol in six core subjects and six modular elective subjects (normally three subjects per semester). They may request to substitute two electives for Principal Study but the decision rests with the VCA. Students are expected to enrol in at least one language elective (Italian, French or German), unless they can demonstrate equivalent credits or experience.

The Head of Opera sees a compelling need to offer courses at 6.25 credit status because of the various symbiotic skills required in opera and because of the differing student backgrounds (vocal, repetiteur, conducting, directing)

The work in the electives will be built around the work in the core subjects. Some electives may not be delivered if there is insufficient demand.

Course subjects	Points
<i>Semester 1:</i>	
(Core)	
Principal Study A	6.25
Music Rehearsal and Performance A	12.5
Production Rehearsal and Performance A	12.5
(Electives)	
Italian for Opera	6.25
French for Opera	6.25
The Opera Performer in the 21 st Century	6.25
Acting skills	6.25
Movement, gesture and costume skills	6.25
<i>Semester 2:</i>	
(Core)	
Principal Study B	6.25
Music Rehearsal and Performance B	12.5
Production Rehearsal and Performance B	12.5
(Electives)	
German for Opera	6.25
English for the Theatre	6.25
Professional Development (Opera)	6.25
Dance skills	6.25
Technical Theatre	6.25

4. EFTSU and Budgetary Consequences

The course will be offered full-time to international and Australian students on a fee-paying basis