

PRESS RELEASE

3 September 2024

Sydney Festival unveils new opera celebrating Las Vegas' greatest duo: Siegfried & Roy

Sydney Festival is excited to announce the first major production of its 2025 program: a captivating new chamber opera inspired by the extraordinary lives of Siegfried Fischbacher and Roy Horn, the legendary Las Vegas duo who became one of the hottest magic acts in entertainment history.

This unique production will be a centrepiece of the 2025 Festival, seamlessly blending powerful vocals, live magic and spectacular theatricality to bring the remarkable story of Siegfried and Roy to life. It captures their improbable rise to stardom and the tender vulnerability at the heart of their journey, co-written by New York trained composer-librettist Luke Di Somma (*The Unruly Tourist*, New Zealand Opera) co-written and directed by Constantine Costi, following his acclaimed production of Puccini's *Il Tabarro* at Sydney Festival 2024.

Olivia Ansell, Festival Director, shared her enthusiasm, stating, "Sydney Festival is known for commissioning big, bold ideas by Australian creatives. This scintillating chamber opera by maverick writers Luke Di Somma and Con Costi chronicles the rags-to-riches journey of Siegfried and Roy, who, at their pre-millennium peak, achieved unprecedented popularity, becoming one of the highest grossing illusion acts in Las Vegas. Staged in our dedicated cabaret room at the Festival's latest precinct – The Thirsty Mile, I'm certain this wickedly entertaining and larger than life spectacle will resonate with both seasoned opera enthusiasts and those new to the artform."

Luke and Con, the creative forces behind the production, said "We are so excited to be bringing *Siegfried & Roy: The Unauthorised Opera* to Sydney Festival this January. From the rags of post-war Germany to the riches of Las Vegas, Siegfried and Roy's unlikely story is perfect fodder for a contemporary operatic comedy. Audiences can expect a show that is both funny and tragic, packed with great tunes sung by some of the best voices in the country. We can't wait!"

From their humble beginnings in poverty-stricken Bremen to their rise as one of the longest running magic acts in Las Vegas (1967-2003), Siegfried and Roy's story is one of wonder and deep companionship.

Taking on the role of *Roy* is Kanen Breen, one of Australia's leading operatic tenors, who has starred in major roles including *Camille* in *The Merry Widow*, *Monostatos* in *The Magic Flute*, and most recently, *Polonius* in Opera Australia's outstanding production of *Hamlet* by Brett Dean and Matthew Jocelyn. He is joined by Christopher Tonkin as Siegfried, an

acclaimed Australian baritone with international recognition for roles such as *Marcello* in *La Bohème* and *Chou En-lai* in *Nixon in China*. Tonkin has performed in over 30 roles, including a six-year residency as principal baritone at Staatsoper Hannover, Germany.

The cast also features some of the country's brightest talents; Cathy-Di Zhang, Louis Hurley, Simon Lobelson and Russell Harcourt.

This production is a fascinating take on their extraordinary journey. It highlights their unbreakable and often co-dependent bond as best friends and creative partners and includes the presence of their beloved tiger, Mantacore. This brand-new Australian production captures the splendour and grandeur of their remarkable lives.

***Siegfried & Roy: The Unauthorised Opera* will run from 8 – 25 January 2025**, at Sydney Theatre Company, Wharf 1 Theatre (The Thirsty Mile), Walsh Bay. Sydney.

Tickets go on sale Tuesday, September 3, 2024. For more information, visit: <https://www.sydneyfestival.org.au/>

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For further information or media opportunities please contact Alice Lewinsky, Common State PR, Alice Lewinsky alice@commonstate.co / 0403 837 351

NOTES TO EDITORS:

About Sydney Festival: Sydney Festival is one of Australia's largest international arts festivals, with a stellar reputation for bold, inventive and intelligent programming. Its vibrancy reflects the confidence, creativity and vigour of one of the world's most beautiful cities.

Under the curation of Festival Director Olivia Ansell, the Festival's mission is to deliver an exhilarating summer of art, drawing stories from Sydney's 65,000-year history through to its contemporary zeitgeist. Sydney Festival stages the world's best artists whilst nurturing its homegrown talent; many of Australia's most memorable theatrical productions have stemmed from its premieres and commissions. The buzz of summer wouldn't be the same without the Festival's spectacular installations, immersive experiences and live events splashed across Sydney each January. In 2026 Sydney Festival will celebrate its 50th anniversary.

Produced by

Commissioned, produced and presented by Sydney Festival

Creative Team

Composer - Luke Di Somma

Libretto - Luke Di Somma and Constantine Costi

Director - Constantine Costi

Conductor - Luke Di Somma
Costume Designer - Tim Chappel
Set Designer - Pip Runciman
Sound Designer – Michael Waters
Lighting Director – Damien Cooper
Magic Consultant – Adam Mada
Puppet Design & Production – Erth Visual & Physical Inc.
Movement Director – Shannon Burns
Creative Producer - Olivia Ansell
Associate Producer - LPD Productions
Supported by Opera Australia

Cast

Siegfried - Christopher Tonkin
Roy - Kanen Breen

With:

Cathy-Di Zhang
Louis Hurley
Russell Harcourt
Simon Lobelson
With more to be announced

Biographies:

Luke Di Somma

Luke Di Somma is an award-winning composer, lyricist, writer, musical director and educator working across musical theatre, opera and television. Originally from Aotearoa New Zealand, Luke is based in Melbourne, Australia.

A Fulbright scholar, Luke studied at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, graduating with a Master of Fine Arts from the Graduate Musical Theatre Writing Programme. Previously he studied composition and conducting at the University of Canterbury and the New Zealand School of Music.

Luke is the co-creator, composer and lyricist for *Happiness* - a new musical TV comedy starring Rebecca Gibney, coming to screens in 2025. Last year he composed and conducted *The Unruly Tourists* for New Zealand Opera, and is the co-writer of hit Kiwi musical *That Bloody Woman*, which is the first New Zealand musical to be licensed by Music Theatre International. His chamber musical *The Things Between Us* played the Christchurch Arts Festival in 2017.

Recent Australian credits include music and sound design for *The Italians* (Belvoir St Theatre, 2022) and *The Resistance* (ATYP, 2023). His debut album *Songs for my Friends* was released in 2021, and he is also the co-creator and composer of a new musical play about anxiety in children.

Outside Australasia, his work has been heard in the United States and the UK. While based in London his music was performed at Andrew Lloyd Webber's The Other Palace Theatre, and he co-wrote the opening number for three *West End Bares* charity concerts in London's West End. His music has been sung by Broadway's Andréa Burns, Olivier winners David Bedella and Rebecca Trehearn, and Tony nominees Andy Karl and Eva Noblezada.

As a musical director and conductor, Luke has worked with most major organisations in New Zealand including New Zealand Opera, Auckland Theatre Company, Auckland Philharmonia, Christchurch Symphony and the Court Theatre. He also founded and lead the Christchurch Pops Choir, formed in post-earthquake Christchurch.

He is also an acclaimed teacher and educator having taught at New York University, the National Institute of the Dramatic Arts, the Victorian College of the Arts, Federation University of Australia and many more. He is also the founding director of the Christchurch International Musical Theatre Summer School where he has taught with Jonathan Groff, Sutton Foster, Andréa Burns, Julia Murney and Joshua Henry.

Constantine Costi

Constantine Costi is an award-winning director and writer working across opera and film. He was co-Artistic Director of Red Line Productions at the Old Fitz Theatre 2020 – 2023 and was Artistic Director Advisor for The Lysicrates Foundation.

Engagements in 2024 have included *Il Tabarro* in Opera Australia's *Il Trittico*, *Pierrot Lunaire* or the Berlin Philharmonic, *Il Tabarro* for Sydney Festival set aboard the historic lightship The Carpentaria, a national tour of *Long Lost Loves (and grey suede gloves)* for Musica Viva, and the documentary feature film *The Golden Spurtle* for Hopscotch Films UK and Hytra Films.

Recent highlights include an immersive baroque experience *Inferno* for the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, and Melbourne, *Cheremushki* for Victorian Opera which was awarded Best Opera Direction at the Greenroom Awards in 2024. His opera film *A Delicate Dire* for Pinchgut Opera based on the madrigals of Barbara Strozzi, was awarded Best Australian Feature Film at the Sydney Women's Film Festival, and the ATOM Award's Best Experimental Film.

2022 included Cesti's *Oronhea* for Pinchgut Opera, a Kurt Weill Double Bill for The Old Fitz Theatre; *Mahagonny Songspiel* and *The Seven Deadly Sins*, and *Il Mago Di Oz* by Pierangelo Valtinoni for Victorian Opera.

2021 he directed *La Traviata* on Sydney Harbour for Opera Australia on one of the world's largest outdoor stages and was named one of the country's 21 hottest creatives of that year by The Australian newspaper.

For the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra, Constantine directed *Karakorum* starring David Wenham, the award-winning production of *Bitter Obsessions*, and *Messiah* which played to standing ovations and sell-out seasons in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.

Constantine won The Berlin New Music Opera Award with The Opera Foundation for Young Australians where he worked with Komische Oper Berlin's directing team on the premiere of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* directed by Barrie Kosky. He was an assistant director and revival director for the Vienna State Opera and NCPA Beijing for Sr David McVicar's *Falstaff*.

For Opera Australia he has assisted and revived the work of directors such as William Kentridge, Damiano Michieletto, Harry Kupfer, John Bell, and Elijah Moshinsky.

Constantine is a directing graduate of the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA).