

Lucia Di Lammermoor returns to Mercury Theatre after 25 years

John Daly-Peoples | WEEKEND REVIEW

Lucia di Lammermoor

by **Gaetano Donizetti**

Auckland Opera Studio

The Auckland Chamber Orchestra and The University of Auckland School of Music Chorus

Mercury Theatre October 10 & 12

Auckland Opera Studio has teamed up with The Auckland Chamber Orchestra to bring some of New Zealand's most outstanding operatic talent to the stage in their production of *Lucia Di Lammermoor* at The Mercury Theatre for two nights.

This stylish new production is directed by Raymond Hawthorne who first produced the opera at the Mercury 25 years ago. He says Auckland Opera Studio "has an impressive reputation of developing young singers as well as bringing top professionals into highly charged and effective productions."

Frances Wilson's school of development for New Zealand's top young opera singers – The Auckland Opera Studio – has been forging the way for New Zealand's future operatic stars for over 10 years. Wilson has dedicated her life to fostering the bel canto style of singing made famous by such indelible voices as Dame Kiri Te Kanawa and Dame Malvina Major.

The Auckland Opera Studio provides a nurturing and supportive environment for talented New Zealand singers to build their vocal aptitudes through private tuition, master classes, showcases and performance opportunities. Key to increasing career opportunities for professional opera singers is the continual development of audience recognition and engagement with opera.

The Mercury Theatre was a famous repertory theatre in Auckland and home to great operas and dramas alike throughout the 1980s. Under Johnathan Hardy, the Mercury took over the mantle of opera for Auckland after the National Opera dissolved.

When Raymond Hawthorne was elected artistic and executive director for the iconic theatre, he too wholeheartedly embraced Auckland's opera needs. Hawthorne had a stable of actors, musicians, dancers, set and costume designers and the Mercury Theatre was open six days a week for most of the year, presenting musicals, dramas and operas. Tracy Grant Lord (designer) was one of the stable of young designers who cut their teeth on all three performance genres and Frances Wilson, the producer of this production was the coach, repetiteur and chorus mistress for the operas.

In 1988 Hawthorne and Grant Lord produced *Lucia Di Lammermoor* at the Mercury Theatre to wide acclaim, with Wilson as coach, repetiteur and chorus mistress. Together they collaborated to bring a dynamic and dramatic take on one of the world's most loved opera's of all time.

Lucia Lammermoor's heart belongs to her young forbidden lover Edgardo Ravenswood who hails from a rival clan. However, Lucia's brother Enrico plans to avoid financial ruin by marrying her off to Arturo regardless of Lucia's refusal to wed him. In this heartfelt opera tragedy, rife with true love, betrayal, madness and murder, Lucia plunges into the depths of despair. It is the most eloquent and potent voice of bel canto opera that carries the audience down with her, imbued with well known and loved aria, culminating in the "mad scene," *Il Dolce Suono*, sung by Marlena Devoe.

The Auckland Chamber Orchestra will be conducted by Peter Scholes.

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