WAAPA presents Australian premiere of ‘Crucible’ opera

A Pulitzer Prize-winning opera based on Arthur Miller’s The Crucible will receive its Australian premiere at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts in October.

The Crucible – An Opera in 4 Acts by Robert Ward opens on Friday 10 October for six performances only at WAAPA’s Geoff Gibbs Theatre. The cast of high-achieving 3rd Year and post-graduate Opera Studies students will be under the baton of renowned New York conductor, Justin Bischof.

Currently Artistic Director and Conductor of the Modus Opera Company in Manhattan, Bischof is also an internationally acclaimed concert organist, improviser and composer with a repertoire that spans from the Baroque to world premieres. In 2000, Bischof won first prize in the American Guild of Organists National Improvisation Competition.

"Not only do we have the expertise of Justin Bischof to help bring this wonderful American opera to the stage," says Patricia Price, WAAPA’s Co-ordinator of Vocal Studies and Opera. "We are also fortunate enough to enjoy a special connection with The Crucible’s composer, Robert Ward."

When advised of the upcoming WAAPA production, Ward expressed his great delight that – after 47 years – his opera is finally premiering in Australia. Keen to be involved in the rehearsal process, Ward has offered to speak to the entire cast before opening night via a transatlantic conference call.

This will give the young Australian singers the unique opportunity to question the 91-year-old American composer about his richly expressive score, which has been said to encompass the breadth and history of American music, with echoes of Copland, sturdy hymn tunes and shades of the blues.

With a superb libretto by Bernard Stambler, Ward’s brilliant operatic adaptation of Arthur Miller’s play about the 1692 Salem witch trials as a metaphor for the 1950s McCarthy hearings, was first performed by the New York City Opera in 1961. The Crucible won all manner of plaudits, including the 1962 Pulitzer Prize for Music and a New York Critics’ Circle Citation. Since then, it has been widely staged around the world – except in Australia, until now.

WAAPA’s production of The Crucible will be directed by Leith Taylor, who has worked extensively both in Australia and overseas as an actor, director, dramaturge and teacher, and who recently spent several years as a lecturer at Singapore’s LaSalle College of the Arts. Musical supervision will be provided by Patricia Price and David Wickham, WAAPA’s Senior Lecturer in Piano.

With such a powerhouse ensemble of highly-qualified professionals working behind the scenes, the Australian premiere of The Crucible is guaranteed to be an exciting theatrical journey for both singers and audience alike.

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Performance Information: The Crucible – An Opera in 4 Acts
Friday 10 – Friday 17 October at 7.30pm.
The Geoff Gibbs Theatre, WAAPA, Edith Cowan University, 2 Bradford St, Mt Lawley.
Tickets are $35 full/$29 concession. Bookings through WAAPA Box Office on 9370 6636.

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For further information or to discuss interview opportunities, please contact:
Anton Maz, Marketing Manager,
Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts
Phone: (08) 9370 6817 Mob: 0404 699 772 Email: a.maz@ecu.edu.au