WEST AUSTRALIAN OPERA



WEST AUSTRALIAN OPERA AND BREAKSEA PRESENT

THE SONG CATCHERS



Lachlan Higgins as Tipu.
Photo by Edify Media

The Song Catchers

23 & 24 October 2026, Albany Entertainment Centre

Director & Librettist Matt Reuben James Ward
Composer Jarred Wall
Conductor & Music Arranger Pia Harris
Set & Costume Design Fiona Bruce
Animation Design Sohan Ariel Hayes
Lighting Design Lucy Birkinshaw
Associate Director Rachael Colmer
Cultural Consultants Aunty Eliza Woods, Aunty Glenda Williams, Uncle Larry Blight, Jarrad Inman, Wagyl Kaip and Rachael Colmer
Contributors Breaksea Youth Writers' Group and Jon Doust

Nan Gina Williams-Ghouse AM
Arum (Tipu's mum) Rachelle Durkin
Marri Jarrad Inman^
Tipu Lachlan Higgins
Mr Ant Jarred Wall^

Breaksea Youth Ensemble Harper Matson, Lillian Grimm, Annabelle MacKinley, Jemma Hickman, Frankie Green, Chelsea Wolfe, Sienna Elliott, Ayla Jade Ricketts James, Genevieve Bishop, Zion Quicke, Juliette Terry, Oaklea Weaver, Helena Prince, Mokshika Singh, Lilah Barnes, Eloise Cheong-Jaworski, Clara Hesford, Callie Van Dongen, Esther Genevieve, Vera Bush, Delphine Weaver

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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live, work and create; the Whadjuk people of the Noongar Nation and the Menang Noongar people.

We pay deep respect to Elders past and present and recognise their continuing cultural, spiritual and custodial connection to Country.

Kalyakoorl, ngalak warangka (forever we sing).

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CAROLYN CHARD AM

Executive Director's Message

West Australian Opera, together with our presenting partners Breaksea, are proud to present The Song Catchers, developed for, by and with the Albany community in recognition of Albany 2026, Western Australia's first bicentenary

This is a story of friendship, adventure and the importance of listening to one another, full of heart and adventure, and made to be enjoyed by audiences of all ages.

We are proud to create this commission in the Great Southern, continuing our commitment to creating experiences that connect people through the power of storytelling and song.

I thank the creative team, artists, musicians, community members, young people and everyone who has shared their stories, ideas and imagination along the way.

I am grateful to Principal Partner, Wesfarmers Arts, Regional Touring Partner MM Electrical, the City of Albany and Lotterywest.

At West Australian Opera, we believe opera belongs to everyone. It can be a place to discover something new, to see your own story reflected, to be swept away by the power of music and imagination. We hope *The Song Catchers* inspires you to listen closely, dream and enjoy the adventure together.



CHRISTOPHER VAN TUINEN

Artistic Director's Message

There is something powerful about a story that begins with listening.

The Song Catchers is a new Australian music theatre work created especially for young audiences, but its ideas are for all of us. At its heart is a story about friendship, courage, belonging and the importance of truly listening to one another.

Created in Albany through conversations and workshops with Menang Noongar Elders, alongside the Breaksea Youth Writers' Group and Artistic Development Panel, this work has been shaped by the voices and experiences of the community.

That process is central to what makes *The Song Catchers* so special. It is not simply a story being brought to a community; it is a story created with community.

Through the adventures of Tipu the fox and Marri the echidna, we are reminded that music can connect us, help us find our voice and bring us back to one another. With original music, storytelling and theatre, this is an adventure for audiences of all ages.

I am proud that West Australian Opera is premiering this new work in collaboration with Breaksea, celebrating the creativity and voices of the Great Southern community.

I hope you enjoy the journey.



MATT REUBEN JAMES WARD

Director's Statement

As an Albany boy, it is deeply meaningful to contribute to this important year through The Song Catchers. I am enormously grateful to the friends and community members who have generously shared their experiences, histories and ambitions in the making of this work. In particular, our youth writers group brought a deep love for this place — its landscape, nature and layered history — and their ideas helped shape the world you will see on stage. To Aunty Eliza, Aunty Glenda and Uncle Larry: to learn from you and be inspired by your knowledge, generosity and graciousness has been an honour. I know that, in both form and message, audiences have not seen anything quite like this before!

At times, it has felt overwhelming to consider how we make art that contributes to ongoing conversations about colonisation and our shared history. *The Song Catchers* is not a history play, nor does it attempt to provide answers. It is an allegorical expression of what we feel compelled to explore: a deep adoration for place and landscape; how pride and guilt can coexist; how we fail, learn and try again.

Ultimately, it is about listening. About humbling ourselves enough to hear one another, to hear the places we inhabit, and perhaps, through doing so, to become better versions of ourselves.



PIA HARRIS

Conductor's Notes

It is an absolute joy to welcome you to *The Song Catchers*.

Throughout the creative development of this production, our conversations explored many ideas and themes. At its heart, *The Song Catchers* is a story about friendship and resilience, and finding the courage and hope to move forward when our relationships, and the world around us, are tested.

As music director, conductor and arranger, it has been a privilege to bring this story to life through music. Jarred Wall's contemporary ideas move seamlessly between playfulness, action and pathos, creating a musical world that is energetic, emotional and full of imagination. Alongside Matt Reuben James Ward's beautifully crafted libretto, and the extraordinary stage design and animation of Sohan Ariel Hayes and Fiona Bruce, the production brings together sound, movement, storytelling and artwork profiling Albany's stunning landscapes, in a truly immersive experience.

The musical soundscape of *The Song Catchers* reflects the spirit of Breaksea itself - where contemporary and classical traditions sit alongside one another. Acoustic and electric guitar, drums and percussion, synth, violin, cello and voices combine as prerecorded and live elements, together with evocative sound design, to create a true variance of colours and textures. The contrast between these sounds supports a rich and ever-changing filmic type score, from intimate moments of reflection to fast-paced and action-packed sequences.

One of the great joys of this production has been working with the Breaksea Youth Ensemble and Musical Theatre students from UWA. 30 young people will be singing alongside some of West Australia's finest performers. We are incredibly proud to be able to give these young artists this opportunity, and to see them contribute such value to the production.

Thank you for joining us on this journey.

I hope *The Song Catchers* entertains you, surprises you, moves you — and leaves you with a renewed sense of hope.

Enjoy the show.


Maton



JARRED WALL

Composer's Notes

I respectfully acknowledge we are on the sacred boodja of the Menang Moort. I, honour the elders of this land, who have maintained this kwobidok boodja for generations and who continue to keep culture alive. I wish to pay particular mention to Aunty Eliza, Aunty Glenda and Uncle Larry who shared their stories so gracefully and openly. This story would not be possible without you.

I would like to thank the Youth Writers Group and the young people involved who shared so much of what was important to them and their community.

As my debut composition, I wish to thank WA Opera for their trust and generosity in the creation of this work.

I would also like to thank Director, Matt Reuben James Ward, and Conductor, Pia Harris, who have trusted me to create songs that reflect the story and also honour my songwriting. Thank you to Carolyn Chard, Chris van Tuinen for your belief in me.

Thank you to all the cast, crew and musicians that have worked tirelessly to bring this story to life. These songs are only one element, there is so much more that goes into making something of this scale and bringing it to life. You are all amazing at what you do!

This story re lects truths that can be di icult to reconcile. We hope you enjoy seeing this work and leave with a message of hope and to know that together, our voices will be heard.

Boordawan (see you again)

Synopsis

The Song Catchers is a lyrical fable of two unlikely friends, set between the ordered fox city of Hillside and the ancient bushland beyond its fence.

The City of Hillside thrives by harvesting the songs of animals from the bush and converting them into energy. Young fox Tipu is expected to follow in the footsteps of his mum, Arum, a proud Song Catcher.

But Tipu has a secret: as a cub, he slipped beyond the fence and befriended Marri, a young echidna. Over the years, they meet in secret, exploring the bush together. Watching their story unfold is Mr Ant, a travelling bard who sings of their friendship and the uncertain road ahead.

When Arum trains Tipu in the family profession, Tipu reluctantly becomes a Song Catcher. Years later, he comes face-to-face with Marri and, believing he has no choice, harvests his friend's song.

Wracked with guilt, Tipu breaks into Hillside's underground vault to retrieve it, accidentally releasing hundreds of captured songs.

The foxes blame the animals beyond the fence and set fire to the bushland in retribution. Tipu flees Hillside to find Marri and return his song, but when Marri tries to sing again, the song cannot be restored.

Marri's wise Nan tells them of the ancient Listening Tree, which cannot return what has been lost but may offer a new song to those willing to listen with an open heart. Guided by Nan's story and Mr Ant's songs, the friends journey through the bush to find it.

At the Listening Tree, Marri discovers a new song, before helping Tipu discover that he too has a song within him. When Arum finally finds them, she arrives not as a Song Catcher, but as Tipu's mum, ready to acknowledge her mistakes and listen.

As Tipu and Marri raise their new songs together, the Listening Tree begins to grow again. Nan is joined by Mr Ant, who asks what will happen when Tipu returns to The City of Hillside. Her answer is simple: it depends if people listen.



Jarred Wall as Mr Ant.
Photo by Edify Media

Biographies



DIRECTOR & LIBRETTIST

Matt Reuben James Ward

Matt Reuben James Ward is an award-winning director working across opera, music theatre and contemporary performance. He is Chair of Music Theatre at the UWA Conservatorium of Music and Artistic Director of Breaksea, a multi-award-winning contemporary performance company creating original music theatre and multi-artform performance work across Western Australia.

For West Australian Opera, Matt's directing credits include *Wundig wer Wilura* (Perth Festival), *La Bohème, Hansel & Gretel* (Opera in the Park), *Koolbardi wer Wardong, The Nightingale* and *Our Little Inventor.* In 2025, he also directed *La bohème* for Opera Queensland.

Through Breaksea, Matt has directed and developed original works including *The Magical Weedy Seadragon*, winner of Outstanding New Musical or Opera at the 2024 WA Performing Arts Awards, and *Aliwah Bardinar!,* created by Gina Williams-Ghouse and Guy Ghouse. His work encompasses large-scale community-engaged productions, festivals, new Australian music theatre and collaborations with First Nations artists.

Matt has performed in 75 theatres across the UK and Europe. His performance credits include Western Union Boy in the Olivier Award-winning *Paul Bunyan* (Linbury Studio, Royal Opera House), Messenger in *Life* to Come (directed by Stephen Fry, Britten Theatre) and London seasons of new musicals. He trained at WAAPA and the Royal College of Music, London (Yvonne Wells Award).



COMPOSER AND MR ANT

Jarred Wall

Jarred Wall also known as Boox Kid, is a proud Wadandi Bibbulmun Noongar artist and the 2025 WAM Vocalist of the Year. A cross-genre artist working across songwriting, production, sound design, theatre, and opera, his 2024 EP Reflections (200,000+ streams) and recent singles have earned editorial playlist support, featuring on New Music Friday, Open Skies, Tapestry and receiving triple j airplay. As Boox Kid, he has performed at BIGSOUND, Perth Festival, St Kilda Festival, WAMFest, and Nannup Music Festival, supported the likes of George Ezra, Dice, Miiesha and Eskimo Joe. Jarred starred in Noongar operas Koolbardi Wer Wardong and Wundig Wer Wilura and has conducted sound design for various theatre shows, all while continuing to champion First Nations artistry through his music and creative practice. Ahead of his new album release 'Kalyakoorl' in 2027, which blends English and Noongar language and celebrates Boox's Noongar heritage, Boox is set to open for GFlip as part of their 'Bed on Fire Tour' Margaret River show on October 31.

In 2026, Jarred is the composer for the new work The Song Catchers a collaboration with West Australian Opera and Breaksea for Albany 2026.



CONDUCTOR & MUSIC ARRANGER

Pia Harris

Performing Arts WA Award and Pinnacle Award-winning creative, Pia Harris is a music director, conductor and arranger with extensive international experience. As an opera singer, she trained at the Royal College of Music London (Aldama Scholar & Bliss Trust Award) and at the English National Opera and National Opera Studio. Pia has performed as a Principal artist with Opera Holland Park,

New York Lyric Opera, and West Australian Opera, notably as Gretel in Hansel & Gretel at Opera in the Park for an audience of 12,000.

As Director of Music at Breaksea, she has arranged, music directed and conducted numerous large-scale projects, including the award-winning children's show Aliwah Bardinar! at Albany Entertainment Centre and Heath Ledger Theatre. This year, Pia was nominated for Outstanding Musical Direction and Conducting at the Performing Arts WA awards for Aliwah Bardinar!



SET & COSTUME DESIGN

Fiona Bruce

Fiona Bruce is a set and costume designer from Perth/Boorloo, working across professional and independent theatre. She is interested in how spaces, objects and clothing help to shape our understanding of the world through visual storytelling. She enjoys the collaborative nature of performance making and how every new project challenges her to make new artistic and technical discoveries.

Recent work includes *Aliwah Bardinar!* for Breaksea/ Barking Gecko Arts (2025), *Stellarphant* for Barking Gecko Arts (2026), *Day (After Day) in the Life of the Useless* (2026), *The Almighty Sometimes* (2026), *Speaking in Tongues* (2025) for Black Swan State Theatre Company, *Secret Opera* (2026) for West Australian Opera/ Perth Festival and *A Dolls House, Part 2* for Red Ryder Productions/ The Blue Room (2024). Fiona has also worked with Perth Festival as a Brand Activator and Scenic Designer (2020-2023) and currently teaches production design at the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA).

Fiona's academic qualifications include a M. Communication Design (RMIT), B.Performing Arts, Production and Design (WAAPA) and B. Arts, Performance Studies (Curtin University).



ANIMATION DESIGN

Sohan Ariel Hayes

Sohan Ariel Hayes is a Western Australian visual artist whose animations illuminate not only the screen but extend into the world, conjuring characters, creatures and phenomena across natural and mythical landscapes. For *The Song Catchers* he is Digital Media Designer, creating the production's animated stage: a projected world inspired by Merningar Boodjar / Albany, every frame crafted in service to the score.

He returns to West Australian Opera after designing *Hansel and Gretel* (2019), and brings a long connection to the south coast: *Kinjarlin: The Place of Rain* (2019) reanimated Robert Dale's 1832 etching of King George Sound in collaboration with Merningar Elder Lynette Knapp and botanist Professor Stephen Hopper. Born on Noongar Boodjar, he works closely with senior Indigenous cultural advisers and scientists.

Hayes was Digital Media Designer for Perth Festival's *HOME* (2016) and *Boorna Waanginy: The Trees Speak* (2017–2024), and recently contributed animation to Lynette Wallworth's feature documentary *Edge of Life* (2025).





LIGHTING DESIGNER

Lucy Birkinshaw

Lucy is an award-winning lighting designer and artist with over two decades of experience. Lucy trained formally in fine arts and lighting design and has worked with national and international companies, from artisanal works to large scale productions. Lucy brings a distinctive sensitivity to depth, contrast and beauty, creating immersive worlds that support storytelling and connect with audiences.

Her practice spans intimate works and large-scale productions for national and international companies, including Sydney Theatre Company, Malthouse Theatre, Opera Australia, Juluwarlu Group, Yirra Yaakin, Griffin Theatre Company and Perth Festival.

Recent designs include Mama Does Derby for Windmill Productions; Walk of the Whales and Stellarphant for Barking Gecko Arts; Snuggleplay for Sensorium; The Shepherd's Hut, Never Have I Ever and The Seed for Black Swan State Theatre Company; Gathering.2 for Co3 Dance Company; Time: Perth for the artist Rone; Nothing Twice (Robert Bondara), Carnivale.6 (Raewyn Hill) and mattering (James O'Hara) for WA Ballet.



ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Rachael Colmer

Growing up in Albany, Rachael has always been interested in the Performing Arts. In 2000, she successfully auditioned and was offered a place at the WA Academy of Performing Arts in Theatre. Rachael's TV credits include Doctor Wallace in Lockie Leonard and Ms Graziana in Itch. In 2023, Rachael was choreographer and workshop leader with Annette Carmichael on Chapter 4 of Stars Descend, a dance performance that responded to the unique biodiversity across the Gondwana Link. Rachael is also a Cultural Consultant and Board Member with Breaksea, a company that provides vocal performance projects in collaboration with professional and community organisations. In 2021, she performed as herself in Breaksea's Caretaker of Lost Selves in Albany and again in Perth in 2024. Recently, Rachael directed and choreographed Kaarla Wirren, a powerful new performance for Albany 2026 that featured local high school students, with more than half of the cast being First Nations.



NAN

Gina Williams-Ghouse

Gina Williams-Ghouse is a Balladong, Whadjuk, Goreng (Noongar) woman with links to the Gitja people of the East Kimberley. She writes and sings songs in Noongar language and brings a modern take on ancient language, using powerful storytelling, musical brilliance and beautiful songs. With her late husband, guitarist Guy Ghouse, Gina has released four albums, two operas (commissioned by the West Australian Opera) and are six-times winners of the WA Music Industry's Indigenous Act of the Year.

Her writing and performance highlights include Koorlangka (2020) and Koort (2022) for Perth Festival, her opera Koolbardi wer Wardong (Magpie and Crow, West Australian Opera), 2021 AFL Grand Final pre-match entertainment, and the launch of her book Kalyakoorl, ngalak warangka (Forever, we sing), published by Magabala Books. Gina and Guy's last opera, Wundig wer Wilura opened Perth Festival 2024 and in 2025, Gina released a new children's work Aliwah Bardinar, performed at AWESOME Children's Festival in Perth, in partnership with Breaksea Youth Theatre.



ARUM (TIPU'S MUM)

Rachelle Durkin

In recent seasons, Australian/American soprano Rachelle Durkin has performed the Fox (*The Cunning Little Vixen*) and Musetta (*La bohème*) for West Australian Opera, Tytania (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) for Adelaide Festival, the Governess (*The Turn of the Screw*) for State Opera South Australia, Rosalinde (*Die Fledermaus*) with the West Australian Symphony, and Donna Anna (*Don Giovanni*) for Pittsburgh Opera and with the Hawai'i Symphony.

She became an established principal artist at the Metropolitan Opera following the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program, appearing over many seasons as Norina (*Don Pasquale*), Mrs Schlesen (*Satyagraha*), Lisa (*La sonnambula*), Clorinda (*La Cenerentola*), Frasquita (*Carmen*), Masha (*Pique Dame*), and First Flower Maiden (*Parsifal*) — also at the Salzburg Festival under James Levine.

A five-time Helpmann Award nominee, Rachelle has performed regularly with Opera Australia, in roles including Norina, Mrs Schlesen, Musetta, Adina (*L'elisir d'amore*), Eurydice (*Orpheus in the Underworld*), and Angelica (*Orlando*).



MARRI

Jarrad Inman

Jarrad Inman is a Noongar man raised in Kinjarling/Albany, Western Australia. Jarrad was born in 2001, the youngest of three brothers whom he credits for getting him into music. Now at the age of 25, Jarrad has been performing in various ways since the age of 11. Jarrad is passionate about his music and plays on the Perth music scene under the name Ricky Neil Jr. He cites David Bowie, Prince, and Freddie Mercury as his major inspirations in music and stage performance. Jarrad's acting career started in Albany at the age of 16 when he joined ALOTCO (Albany Light Opera Theatre Company) and would continue throughout the years in Albany. Jarrad's most prominent role within WAO to date was the part of "Koolbardi" in Gina Williams and Guy Ghouse's opera, *Koolbardi Wer Wardong*, starting back in 2021, a role he is immensely proud to have played.



TIPU

Lachlan Higgins

Lachlan Higgins is an Australian baritone based in Melbourne. He completed a degree in Classical Voice at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts in 2021, followed by a master's degree in Advanced Opera Performance at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, studying with Geoffrey Moses. Lachlan's recent roles include Stanley (*A Streetcar Named Desire*), Josef K (*The Trial*), Joseph De Rocher (*Dead Man Walking*), Don Giovanni, Demetrius (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Schaunard (*La bohème*) and Marco (*Gianni Schicchi)*. He has appeared with Freeze Frame Opera, West Australian Opera, Lost and Found Opera, Opera de Bauge, Grange Park Opera, and The MSO. Lachlan was recently awarded Outstanding Newcomer at the 2025 Performing Arts WA Awards for his performance as Joseph De Rocher in Dead Man Walking.

He is a current artist of the Melba Opera Trust and is generously supported by the Paulette Bisley Opera Scholarship and the Max and Jill Schultz Opera Society Scholarship.



Gina Williams-Ghouse AM as Nan, Jarrad Inman as Marri
Photo by Edify Media

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Rachelle Durkin as Arum.
Photo by Edify Media

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Image: La Traviata backstage
Photo: Owen Gregory

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