

**ITEM 6. CULTURAL AND CREATIVE GRANTS AND SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM – OPERA AUSTRALIA – ‘SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE - THE OPERA’ 60<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY PROJECT 2016**

**FILE NO: S126455**

**SUMMARY**

Opera Australia will celebrate its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2016. As part of their celebrations, they are planning an outdoor opera season (with subsequent seasons in 2017 and 2018). In 2016, Opera Australia aims to present a high profile and accessible performance of *Sydney Opera House - The Opera (The Opera)*.

*The Opera* will be performed outdoors on five occasions on the Sydney Opera House Monumental Steps and form the centrepiece of the year-long 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. *The Opera* will feature a full chorus, leading local, national and international performers and inspired designs for the set and costumes. It is expected that the 2016 season will attract between 14,500 - 22,500 people.

The City has been invited to support the celebrations through sponsorship of the series, with Opera Australia requesting sponsorship of \$250,000 each year for three years. Following assessment against the criteria of the Cultural and Creative Grants and Sponsorship Program, it is recommended that the City provide a one-year sponsorship of \$100,000 cash (excluding GST) to recognise this significant anniversary in 2016.

*The Opera* aligns with the objectives set out in the City’s Creative City Cultural Policy as it will encourage new audiences for cultural activity, present a large scale and internationally recognised production and activate the city. The production aims to draw 4,000 international, interstate and intrastate tourists to the city and is only the second season of this Australian work.

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve cash sponsorship of \$100,000 (excluding GST) for Opera Australia to produce *Sydney Opera House - The Opera* in October/November 2016; and
- (B) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to negotiate, execute and administer a sponsorship agreement with Opera Australia.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Nil.

**BACKGROUND**

1. The Australian Opera Company was formed in Sydney in 1956, under the auspices of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. It commemorated the Mozart bicentenary by presenting four Mozart operas and 169 performances in all capital cities of Australia. In 1970, the company became known as The Australian Opera. The 1970s saw considerable changes both in administration and location. The Sydney Opera House, a distinctive cultural landmark in Sydney, gave the company a permanent performance home and thus helped to expand its repertoire and develop local audiences. Opera Australia was formed by the merger of The Australian Opera and the Victoria State Opera companies in 1996.
2. Opera Australia will celebrate its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2016. As part of their celebrations, they are planning a series of outdoor operas that will take place in 2016, 2017 and 2018. In 2016, Opera Australia aims to present a high profile, accessible and quality performance of *Sydney Opera House - The Opera (The Opera)*. *The Opera* will be performed outdoors on five occasions on the Sydney Opera House Monumental Steps and form the centrepiece of the year-long 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations in 2016.
3. *The Opera* is a large scale live production inspired by Opera Australia's mission to connect with wider and more diverse audiences. *The Opera* is a contemporary opera written by Alan John and Dennis Watkins celebrating the creation of the Sydney Opera House as an icon of Australia's creative and technical achievement. *The Opera* presents the story of what transpired in Jorn Utzon's struggle to create this iconic building.
4. This Opera, which was previously known as the Eighth Wonder, has had two successful seasons inside the Sydney Opera House – in 1995 and again in 2000 - and it received a [Helpmann Award for Best Opera](#) in 2001.
5. Celebrating Opera Australia's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, *The Opera* will be presented on the steps of the Sydney Opera House. It will feature a full chorus, leading local, national and international performers and inspired designs for the set and costumes. It is expected that the 2016 season will attract up to 22,500 people.
6. Thematically, this opera celebrates Sydney's beauty and utilises the backdrop of the Sydney Opera House, a focal point which will position the production on an international stage. This outdoor, large scale production aims to build on the highly successful Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour and provide a balance to the indoor main stage seasons.
7. The production aligns with the following objectives set out in the City's Creative City Cultural Policy:
  - (a) Encouraging new audiences – Opera Australia aims to connect with wider and more diverse audiences, in particular, first time opera goers. It is proposed that ticket prices are reduced, ranging from \$60 to \$110 per ticket, which is half the usual ticket price for opera performances of this standard;
  - (b) Presenting a large global event – *The Opera* is planned as an international production that will be marketed to international and national audiences. The production will also feature local, national and international performers and producers. It is expected at least 4,000 people per performance will be intrastate, interstate or international tourists; and

- (c) Activating the City – the production aims to draw audiences of up to 22,500 people to the city for the 2016 season. The timing of this production is important to the City’s strategies to present the City as “Open for Business” throughout the George Street capital works program.
8. The City acknowledges Opera Australia’s reputation for producing large scale productions of international quality and artistic direction, and the high calibre of the performers used in its productions. The assessment panel has recommended that the sponsorship agreement contain conditions requiring the presentation of a marketing strategy that demonstrates reach to new local audiences and a ticketing strategy to increase the reach of this production to City of Sydney communities specifically.
  9. Due to the special opportunity that this project presents and the level of partnerships that are required to ensure its financial viability, the funding proposal warranted consideration outside of the City’s usual funding rounds. The demands and complexity of securing partners, operational plans and international marketing campaigns mean that the timing of funding notification is critical, and the usual funding rounds would not provide sufficient lead time for successful planning and delivery.
  10. The application was assessed by a panel of staff from the Grants, Creative City and Venue Management Units. The application was assessed against Cultural and Creative Grants and Sponsorship program criteria, which aligns with the priorities of the Creative City Cultural Policy.
  11. Opera Australia has secured funding support from Destination NSW (the dollar amount is deemed confidential by Destination NSW) and the Sydney Opera House Trust. The total cost of the project is estimated to be \$3.077million.
  12. It is therefore recommended that the City provide one year sponsorship of \$100,000 cash (excluding GST) to recognise this significant anniversary in 2016. This level of funding is in keeping with the sponsorship the City has provided to other organisations for similar celebrations / anniversaries.
  13. It should be noted that Opera Australia was previously approved to receive an annual allocation of value-in-kind for free banner pole hire. This allocation is valued at approximately \$16,000 per year and may be utilised for this project.
  14. In addition to the cash funding, City staff will provide marketing and media support, including social media content, an article in the Whats On newsletter, and press releases to local media. Consideration will also be given to the City History Unit presenting a history talk at Customs House as part of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 2016.
  15. Funding for the 2017 and 2018 seasons is not recommended. The proposal identifies the opportunity for the production to grow its audiences in the second and third years. With this growth, the production will be able to generate independent additional income for the second and third seasons.

## KEY IMPLICATIONS

### Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030

16. Sustainable *Sydney 2030* is a vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2030 and beyond. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the City, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This sponsorship is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
  - (a) Direction 1 - A Globally Competitive and Innovative City – *The Opera* will be promoted internationally highlighting a unique event performed by one of Australia's premier performing arts companies against the backdrop of the Sydney Opera House and the beauty of Sydney Harbour. It will confirm Sydney's place as one of the world's great cultural centres.
  - (b) Direction 5 - A Lively and Engaging City Centre – *The Opera* will attract significant domestic and international media coverage across all mediums. The showcasing of Sydney, and the City of Sydney, as a home to large scale outdoor opera is likely to promote strong pride within the creative and broader community.
  - (c) Direction 7 - A Cultural and Creative City – this proposal aligns with the City's aims under this direction, specifically the desire to strengthen cultural partnerships internationally, generate new audiences and recognise the contributions of one of Sydney's premier companies.

### Social / Cultural / Community

17. Supporting cultural activity and ensuring it is accessible is a key priority for the City. This project provides audience development opportunities, both local and international, for the sector and aims to encourage first time opera goers to attend.
18. Unlike most operas, this event will feature the work of contemporary Australian writers Alan John and Dennis Watkins. This is only the second season of this Australian work. While most productions are popular operas by internationally based composers and companies, this production also has local relevance to the Sydney Opera House and Sydney's local history.

### Economic

19. A season of five performances has the capacity to accommodate 22,500 people. It is expected that this audience will have an economic impact on the city's local business community across accommodation, hospitality and retail.

## BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

20. Funding of \$100,000 cash (excluding GST) was not anticipated. It is proposed that these funds may be absorbed into 2015/16 City Life Draft Operating budgets, however if there is a shortfall, funds will be drawn from the 2015/16 General Contingency budget.

## RELEVANT LEGISLATION

21. Section 356 of the Local Government Act 1993.

**CRITICAL DATES / TIME FRAMES**

22. Planning is underway for the project to take place in October-November 2016. Organisers request early advice to ensure that budgets, partners and operational plans can be finalised and promotional opportunities maximised, particularly in the international market.

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