

## THE AUSTRALIAN

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### Opera Australia to auction historic costumes



Opera Australia costume alteration supervisor Hanneke Raanhuis checks through dozens of costumes in preparation for the winter auction. Picture: Jeremy Piper

MICHAELA BOLAND THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM December 31, 2016

It is a quirk of Opera Australia's wardrobe department that each time a performer is assigned a costume, their name, the character, opera and production date are written on a cloth label sewn into the garment.

The labels are one way the nation's busiest performing arts company has kept track of the performance history of its massive wardrobe of frocks, coats, props, headdresses and assorted paraphernalia.

Now, for the first time in OA's 60-year history, those costumes are destined for a spring clean, a public auction of 2000 of the best pieces — when the labels will come into their own.

The Armida dress worn by Yvonne Kenny in OA's 1999 production of *Rinaldo* is one of the many as-yet uncatalogued items to be sold. There are coats and trousers worn by David Hobson and Graham Pushee, but there won't be anything worn by Dame Joan Sutherland, whose frocks have been preserved for posterity.

OA chief executive Craig Hassell said: "For collectors, knowing who has worn these items and when is absolute gold."

OA costume alteration supervisor Hanneke Raanhuis said a wardrobe clean-out had been flagged throughout the five years she has worked at the company.

"It's nice to see them getting a second life because they're just sitting there," she said.

Ms Raanhuis is one of four wardrobe department staff who from April will sort through 78 crates in storage at Blacktown, western Sydney, where they occupy about 160sq m of space.

She said OA's bespoke costumes for all the big operas tended to be fastened with press studs and hook and eyes, rarely velcro or zips. "There's a lot of fakery going on but if a zip breaks two minutes before showtime you've got a problem," she said.

As OA decommissioned productions, sets were thrown away but the costumes were always retained in case they were needed for new shows.

The auctions on June 30 and July 31 will take place at OA's headquarters in Surry Hills, Sydney, with public viewing the week before. Mr Hassell said it was impossible to say how much the sell-off would raise until all the items were catalogued.

The auction will be the most complex ever undertaken by Melbourne establishment auction house Leonard Joel, which has operated a Sydney office in recent years.

"The OA auction will be a highlight of 2017," said Leonard Joel managing director and chief auctioneer John Albrecht. "So long as the opera company let me, I want to do the whole auction in costume as Napoleon or Frederick the Great," Mr Albrecht said.



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