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Review: Love Burns, by State Opera of SA

State Opera's latest in a series of almost forgotten and overlooked Australian operas is rewarding on reacquaintance.

Ewart Shaw

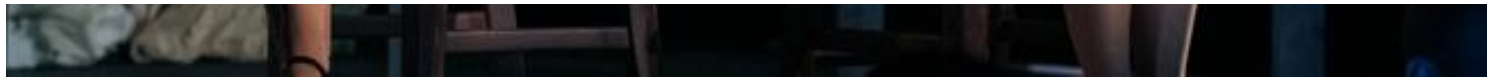
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Love Burns by State Opera South Australia. Picture: Soda Street Productions

Love burns. Love heals. Love and death, the motive forces of opera, here galvanise the lives of a seedy dance instructor and a psychopathic former nurse who starts the show by trying to kill a patient.

On a small stage in a corner of a repurposed factory, two desperate losers make their murderous mark.

Almost 30 years from the 1992 Adelaide Festival premiere, Graeme Koehne's sparsely textured score for chamber ensemble stands up well, and Anthony Hunt is alert to the shifts of rhythm and emotional temperature.



Love Burns by State Opera South Australia. Picture: Soda Street Productions, supplied

But 30 years on and Adelaide has much more experience of suburban serial killers. The shocks are muted but the laughs are still there.

Louis Nowra's vernacular libretto is catalogued as an "opera ironico" in which the grand themes of Verdi's

Macbeth, and yes, Sondheim's Sweeney Todd, become domestic. "Don't eat the pies? Don't drink the cocoa."

Director Nicholas Cannon draws on Jack's profession, with choreographed moments on a severe set, designed, like the almost colourless costumes by Simone Romaniuk and lit by Ben Flett. Its conscious drabness underscores the banality of their lives.

Cannon is well served by his cast. Jessica Dean is Angela, an angel of death, with her incisive singing contrasting with the matter of fact nature of her murderous and conscienceless approach to life.

Mark Oates has a seductive line in sleaze, sings finely, and ends up emotionally drained. By the way, whatever he calls himself when romancing rich widows, his name is Jack. Jack Worthing perhaps, that other cunning seducer?



Love Burns by State Opera South Australia. Picture: Soda Street Productions, supplied

Jeremy Tatchell, Rosie Hosking and Cherie Boogaart are victims, the forces of law and order, and finally the voices of justification. The need for love burns in all our souls, they sing.

From that first production, I have always recalled the true love theme, a Koehne inspiration, a folk-like melody at the start and the end of the opera. Everything between is sad and desperate, unromantic and closer to the truth.

This is State Opera's latest in a series of almost forgotten and overlooked Australian operas. Resuscitated, revived, restored, whatever, but rewarding on reacquaintance.

Love Burns

State Opera of South Australia

Plant 4, Bowden

June 3 to 6

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Arts

Festival executive director resigns

The executive director of the Adelaide Festival has resigned after just a year and a half to take up a new position interstate.

