

PIA HARRIS

WAO Conductor & Soprano | Breaksea Director of Music & Mentorship | JSO Choral Director

Biography

Pia Harris is a music director, conductor and soprano based in Perth, Western Australia after several years in London. Since her Masters at Royal College of Music London (Aldama Scholar & Bliss Trust Award) and training programmes at English National Opera and the National Opera Studio, she has sung extensively as a Principal artist with Opera Holland Park London (Holland Park & Royal Albert Hall), New York Lyric Opera (Carnegie Hall & Symphony Space) and West Australian Opera, most notably as 'Gretel' in West Australian Opera's Hansel & Gretel | Opera in the Park for an audience of 12,000. For Breaksea, Pia has performed, programmed and produced many large scale projects over the last 5 years, most recently conducting Breaksea's Thunderstorm at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. Pia is currently on the Perth Symphony Orchestra Women on the Podium Conducting Programme under the direction of Alice Farnham and Jessica Gethin. In 2022, Pia assisted Conductor Rebecca Lang on West Australian Opera's Tosca and Northern Ireland Opera's La Traviata. In 2023, Pia was appointed Director of Music & Mentorship at Breaksea and choral director at Joondalup Symphony Orchestra. For West Australian Opera, Pia was off stage conductor on WAO Otello, conducted WAO Opera in Kalgoorlie, is music directing two choral projects for West Australian Opera in Cockburn and Gosnells. Pia also music directed and conducted Origins - 2023 City of Joondalup Community Choral Project, and music directed and performed in The Magical Weedy Seadragon for Breaksea.



Pia Harris on tour for Breaksea Festival Kununurra 2022

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What I can offer

With 8 years of history in working on community engagement strategies through the arts, I am committed to ensuring my activities are inclusive, accessible and meaningful and that my projects are driven by the needs and visions of the community I am working with. Principles of respect, diversity and active engagement are embedded in the projects to build and maintain community and social cohesion.

Through my conducting training with Perth Symphony Orchestra's Women on the Podium, I have the ability to interpret a score, understand musical expression (tempo, dynamics, articulation), accuracy in the cueing of entries, and shaping of phrases. I am a leader and have the ability to communicate my musical ideas effectively to an ensemble. I'm fortunate to have strong musicianship skills in being able to break down parts, pitching, analysing rhythms and patterns. Equally, I am fortunate to have strong vocal skills having trained at the Royal College of Music London, National Opera Studio & English National Opera. With the best possible training, I am able to impart vocal technique and phrasing, tricks and tips for learning pitches, ways to negotiate difficult passages with ease and to create and achieve the best possible sound from participants. I am also able to effectively demonstrate and utilise 'call and response' as an immediate way to learn music quickly. I am therefore ideally placed to lead workshops and new creative developments, program concerts, teach music and rehearse, and conduct in performance.



Pia Harris *conducting UWA Choral Society & Australian Baroque Orchestra, Winthrop Hall 2023.*

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2022/2023 PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Music directing & Conducting

WAO Opera in Kalgoorlie

Over a month's period, Kalgoorlie music staff prepared the Goldfields Youth Chorus supported by Lotterywest for the WAO Opera in Kalgoorlie concert. I was contracted to conduct the chorus in performance, MC the concert, and music direct the project alongside Tommaso Pollio, integrating popular music and opera to create a variety concert that would engage the youth participants and the Kalgoorlie audience.

I developed new choral arrangements of pieces, Diamonds (Rhianna), Keeping your head up (Birdy), Running up that hill (Kate Bush) and Fly away (Tones & I). In addition, I made video learning tracks of each vocal part, singing into the camera with a piano doubling the vocal part, together with the accompaniment. I have found my 'accessible learning process' to be invaluable for youth and community participants as an easy way to learn, to have something to refer to between rehearsals and to use different vocal part tracks to sing against, to check their learning of their part. The creation of these tracks ensures quality across the project and cuts down the learning time in the rehearsal room. I had the opportunity to work with the youth chorus over a two week period and was encouraged by their improvement over such a short period of time, their enthusiasm and willingness to take direction. This resulted in a positive, exciting performance experience for the chorus, where they were proud of what they had achieved and will treasure these memories for life.



Goldfields Youth Chorus *WAO Opera in Kalgoorlie, 2023.*

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WAO Otello

I had the great opportunity to be the offstage conductor on WAO Otello in 2023. I was able to rehearse with brass players from WASO, the WAO Chorus, WASO cor anglais and harp players, and conduct them in the four performances. This was certainly a career highlight for me to be employed as a conductor for the state company. Artistic Director Chris van Tuinen mentored me through the process, instructing me to be 'early' in cueing players and singers but to conduct in the conductor's tempo. I received very positive feedback from Chris, WASO and the WAO chorus. Chris also gave me the opportunity to conduct WASO, the WAO Principals and chorus in a Stage and Orchestra rehearsal, conducting the opening of the opera was another incredible career highlight.



Pia Harris conducting WAO Chorus in WAO Otello rehearsals, His Majesty's Theatre 2023.

Origins - City of Joondalup Community Choral Project

In March 2023, I music directed and conducted Origins, City of Joondalup Community Choral Project. I explored the idea of rebirth in music and the arts, celebrating our West Australian artists and homegrown storytelling. I dove into the WA Songbook from Birds of Tokyo to Tim Minchin; we sang in Noongar language; and used the wealth of home grown music to renew, revive and restore us.

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I generated new choral arrangements of pieces, Never tear us apart (INXS), Wanjoo (Gina Williams & Guy Ghouse), Lanterns & Two of us (Birds of Tokyo), together with solo My House (Tim Minchin) and Breaksea original Horizon (Brain & Ward). In addition, I utilised my 'accessible learning process' to assist the participants in learning the repertoire quickly and accurately.

Over a 7 week period, I met with the 250 strong choir, beginning with a meditative physical warm up, and a challenging and fun 'round' with varying parts that we added to each week. We then progressed to our pieces; utilising all of my musicianship and vocal skills to prepare the choir for the performances. I finished the sessions with meditative, uplifting music, allowing participants to express their thoughts and feelings in words or pictures in a post-workshop expression handout. I always promoted connection and social cohesion between participants giving them a holistic, hope filled experience through the joy of singing and music making.



Pia Harris conducting Origins ~ City of Joondalup Community Choral Project, Aurora Tent Hillary's Boat Harbour, 2023

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Breaksea ~ The Magical Weedy Seadragon

With the support of government grants, Matt Ward and I were able to develop, produce and perform a new interactive children's music and performance work - The Magical Weedy Seadragon. Following our 'facilitated devising process' we were able to work closely with over 1,000 children from across the Great Southern, developing ideas, characters, lyrics and creative content.

Workshops explored singing and performance skills, visual art, creative writing, content development, and social themes such as kindness, resilience and environmental values.

The young participants received valuable opportunities to enhance their artistic, technical & organisational skills. The final version of The Magical Weedy Seadragon showcased the ideas of over a thousand youth. We witnessed a remarkable improvement in skills across the 5-month mentorship, ultimately empowering and equipping youth with valuable life skills for the future.

The Magical Weedy Seadragon school workshops were an integral part of the creative process, as unlike any other production, the show was created in collaboration with children.

An 8 schools 'tour' ended the schools' engagement, presenting the finished production in gyms or school halls with 3 professional shows at the Albany Entertainment Centre, and performances at Awesome Festival and Mandurah Arts Festival. When asked what they enjoyed most from Breaksea's visits, many participants said 'to see their ideas & characters come to life'.



Pia Harris & Matt Ward co directors at Breaksea leading workshops with children from Kojonup District High School, 2023.

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Singing & Producing

WAO Opera in Narrogin

Alongside my colleagues Tommaso Pollio, Paul O'Neill, Lachlann Lawton, Chelsea Burns, and MC Scott Winfield, we performed in concert at the Narrogin Town Hall. Singing arias and duets by Verdi, Mozart, Puccini, Bizet and Pollio/Jayakumar mash-ups, it was a well-received successful concert and tour. We were supported by stage manager Rose Liggins and producer Terasa Letizia.



Pia Harris & Tommaso Pollio *perform in WAO Opera in Narrogin, 2022.*

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WAO Koolbardi

I was able to assist as a producer and regional tour coordinator for WAO Koolbardi in Bunbury. Actively liaising with the Bunbury music staff, the cast, WAO Music Director Joshua Haines, Director Matt Ward and Stage Managers Karen Farmer and Rose Liggins, it was a joy to work with the children, facilitating their involvement with the company and being on stage. I enjoyed engaging with parents via email with cast allocations, costuming and schedules to ensure a seamless experience with WAO, with prompt communication, professionalism and enthusiasm.



Pia Harris & WAO Team with the Bunbury Barna Children's Chorus supported by Lotterywest, Bunbury Regional Entertainment Centre, 2023.

Other highlights



Pia Harris conducting Joondalup Symphony Orchestra Chorus & Band - Space Concert, 2023

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Pia Harris & Breaksea Team leading workshops with children from East Kimberley College as part of Breaksea Festival Kununurra, 2022.



Pia Harris leading workshops with community participants in the Great Southern, Breaksea Festival 2021.

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Photos of Breaksea's *Thunderstorm* starring Jarrad Inman, Ashlyn Tymms & Lachlann Lawton
Breaksea Team with Conductor Pia Harris & Director Matt Ward after *Thunderstorm*, Art Gallery of
Western Australia, 2023.

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Pia Harris as Jell.O in Breaksea's *The Magical Weedy Seadragon*, Albany Entertainment Centre, Awesome Festival, Mandurah Arts Festival 2023.



Pia Harris & Sara Macliver in Breaksea's *Fairy Queen*, Albany Entertainment Centre, 2022.

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Pia Harris as Pretoria in Breaksea’s *Caretaker*, Albany Entertainment Centre, 2021.



Pia Harris with Sam Dundas, Fiona Campbell, Adrian Tamburini & Matt Ward in *Ned Kelly*, 2019

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Pia Harris as Gretel with Ashlyn Tymms as Hansel in WAO Hansel & Gretel, audience of 12,000, Opera in the Park 2020



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Pia Harris as Chocholka in WAO Cunning Little Vixen, His Majesty's Theatre, 2018.



Pia Harris as Yvette in Opera Holland Park's La Rondine, London 2017.