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Young Artist Profile: Greg Eldridge - 'Preparation is the most important thing'

The Australian stage director on making sure that a production goes smoothly, from managing the schedule to standing in for sopranos during love scenes.

BY [LOTTIE BUTLER](#) (FORMER ASSISTANT CONTENT PRODUCER (NEWS AND SOCIAL MEDIA))

13 JULY 2015 AT 3.07PM | [COMMENT ON THIS ARTICLE](#)



Stage Director Greg Eldridge in rehearsals for the JPYA Summer Performance © Signe Roderik 2015

'A good assistant is different to a good director as the roles demand very different skill sets', says Jette Parker Young Artist [Greg Eldridge](#) (<http://www.roh.org.uk/people/greg-eldridge>). 'One of the great joys of directing is the freedom it gives you to respond immediately to what the performers offer, and collaborate with them on the interpretation of the text and music.'

Greg joined the [Jette Parker Young Artists Programme](#) (<http://www.roh.org.uk/about/jette-parker-young-artists-programme>) as Stage Director in the 2013/14 Season. He has since worked on 11 main stage productions as Assistant Director, directed two JPYA performances (*La scala di seta*; *Così fan tutte* Act 1 and *La favorite* Act 1), and worked on various productions with the ROH Learning & Participation department. He will next direct [Betrothal and Betrayal](#) (<http://www.roh.org.uk/events/2qrjf>), the annual JPYA Summer Performance in which the Jette Parker Young Artists perform a series of scenes on the main stage.

'Over the past two years the other Jette Parker Young Artists and I have built up a rapport, so it's fabulous to have the freedom to create with them. They are a very talented group, with a great breadth of experience', he says. 'We also have an amazing theatre to perform in, and my aim is to make the most of every element of it. We use a pre-existing set from one of the productions currently on stage, which will give us a chance to show our craft in one of the most versatile sets in the ROH repertory.'



[Lauren Fagan, Caroline Dowdle, Samuel Dale Johnson and Stage Director Greg Eldridge rehearsing scenes from the JPYA Summer Performance © Signe Roderik 2015](#) (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/royaloperahouse/19194058148/in/set-72157655166126890>)



The performance will feature excerpts from **Verdi** (<http://www.roh.org.uk/people/giuseppe-verdi>)’s **Simon Boccanegra** (<http://www.roh.org.uk/productions/simon-boccanegra-by-elijah-moshinsky>), Cilea’s **Adriana Lecouvreur** (<http://www.roh.org.uk/productions/adriana-lecouvreur-by-david-mcvicar>), **Bizet** (<http://www.roh.org.uk/people/georges-bizet>)’s *Les pêcheurs de perles* and other works, accompanied by the **Welsh National Opera Orchestra** (<https://www.wno.org.uk/meettheorchestra>).

‘The Summer Performance can be trickier than doing a full show. With a full production, there is an opportunity to create character arcs and nuance over an evening, whereas the Summer Performance is a series of snapshots’, explains Greg. ‘Thankfully, we have some good meaty excerpts. Each scene offers a glimpse into the life of different people in different worlds, but the performance will be held together by the timeless themes of love and betrayal.’

Most recently, Greg has assisted with the revival of **Kasper Holten** (<http://www.roh.org.uk/people/kasper-holten>)’s production of **Don Giovanni** (<http://www.roh.org.uk/productions/don-giovanni-by-kasper-holten>), which he also worked on during its creation last year. As Assistant Director, his job includes managing the schedule, taking detailed rehearsal notes, running cover calls and carrying out show duties after the production opens.

‘The responsibilities vary depending on the show, but in essence, our job is to ensure that the director’s vision of the work is what is presented on stage’, he explains. ‘Preparation is the most important thing. We have to learn the opera back to front, ensuring that we know the movements, text and music of absolutely everyone involved in the production so that if someone is absent in rehearsal, we can walk the role at a moment’s notice. I have done more love scenes with a tenor than I would care to admit! Similarly, if the Director is delayed or ill, there is the expectation that we will be able to step in to take the call; the rehearsal must go on.’

‘In addition, we have to keep accurate notes in our score, from technical details to movement and subtext, so that when a revival comes along the director’s original intention is always preserved. Then, when the rehearsals move on stage, we either sit with the director taking notes or work backstage with a headset, communicating information quickly to singers and stage management.’

Since joining the programme, Greg has assisted on productions ranging from **Francesca Zambello** (<http://www.roh.org.uk/people/francesca-zambello>)’s classic **Carmen** (<http://www.roh.org.uk/productions/carmen-by-francesca-zambello>) to **John Fulljames** (<http://www.roh.org.uk/people/john-fulljames>)’s new staging of **Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny** (<http://www.roh.org.uk/productions/rise-and-fall-of-the-city-of-mahagonny-by-john-fulljames>).

‘I had a period this Season where I assisted on **Tristan und Isolde** (<http://www.roh.org.uk/productions/tristan-und-isolde-by-christof-loy>), **Andrea Chénier** (<http://www.roh.org.uk/productions/andrea-chenier-by-david-mcvicar>) and *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* back-to-back with no break in between’, he says. ‘Each show gets at least four weeks of rehearsal and stage time, and so I was preparing a good six months in advance to make sure I’d learnt it. It’s full on, but really exciting.’

Greg studied law and acting at **Monash University** (<http://www.monash.edu/>) in Melbourne, Australia, before moving to Florence to study opera direction. He has directed and assisted on over forty productions of theatre, music theatre and opera across Australia and Europe. Next Season, he takes up the position of Jette Parker Associate Director, and will be directing the annual **Meet the Young Artists Week Performance** (<http://www.roh.org.uk/productions/meet-the-young-artists-week-performance-by-jette-parker-young-artists>), which this year will be Peter Maxwell Davies’s *The Lighthouse*.

‘It’s great to be here for another year’, he says. ‘You have the best chorus, the best stage management, and the best company

management in the world. They make it so easy that all of the energy can go into the performance. There is a tannoy in every room so everyone knows what's going on stage – as if the theatre is the beating heart of the opera house and everyone, no matter where they work, can hear the fruits of their labour being realized.’

The Jette Parker Young Artists Programme is supported by Oak Foundation. [**Find out more about the Programme**](#)

<http://www.roh.org.uk/about/jette-parker-young-artists-programme>).

Betrothal and Betrayal takes place on 18 July at 1pm. [**Tickets are available**](#) (<http://www.roh.org.uk/productions/jpya-summer-performance-by-greg-eldridge>).



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