


# Chief urges end to Opera Australia gender inequity

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Opera Australia chief executive Fiona Allan says the company has a “massive gender inequity” in its artistic leadership, and the solution to the imbalance is to employ more women at the national company.

Allan joined OA last November and is the first woman to hold the administrative reins of the company, which employs hundreds of people and presents a year-round opera program.

Allan and OA’s board are in the final stages of appointing an artistic director to succeed Lyndon Terracini, and she has signalled her preference that the job go to somebody who values gender equity. “It’s certainly something I am looking at intently at Opera Australia, because we have a massive gender inequity when it comes to creative leadership,” she says.

“When you look across our creative teams – our conductors, directors – we’re nowhere near equal.”

Allan makes the comments in a short documentary, *Top Job*, by singer and artistic director Miriam Gordon-Stewart, which addresses the gender imbalance in opera leadership.

Opera artists who speak in the film are Deborah Cheetham, Lindy Hume, Ali McGregor and Simone Young, and University of Melbourne academic Caitlin Vincent.

Young was music director of OA from 2001-03, and Hume was previously artistic director of

West Australian Opera, Victoria State Opera and OzOpera, the former name of OA's touring company.

The documentary addresses some of the reasons women have been excluded from artistic director roles, including that they also have been excluded as stage directors and conductors – traditional career paths to positions of artistic leadership.

Young says opera companies in their marketing materials should avoid a “genderisation of language” about opera artists that makes a special case of women's achievements.

Cheetham, a Yorta Yorta soprano, composer and artistic director of Short Black Opera, says OA should have two women in charge, meaning Allan and a female artistic director.

“It's so important that Opera Australia has two women at the helm, because it's just in such a terrible state of distress, and it needs someone who can nurture it back to life,” she says in the documentary.

Allan says: “It stunned me that the foremost national performing arts company in this country would not have considered (gender equity) as important as it is. So it needs a changeover of artistic leadership and someone who comes in who values it.”

*Top Job is available to view free online from October 22, at [topjobfilm.com](http://topjobfilm.com)*

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