

# Annual Report

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# 2024

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OOPERA  
BALETTI





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The world premiere of the ballet *Édith Piaf – La vie en rose* took place in February 2025. Press interest had already been piqued in autumn 2024.



Year 2024

# The Finnish National Opera and Ballet in a nutshell

As a national cultural institution, the principal mission of the Finnish National Opera and Ballet is to create, perform and develop opera and ballet experiences of international quality that resonate with diverse audiences and age groups across Finland. In short, we want to make opera and ballet available to everyone.

Through creativity and expertise, we aim for the highest artistic standards. We strive to be a source of national pride and to gain international recognition not only in opera and ballet, but in all areas of our work.

Our core values are creativity, openness, responsibility and respect. We are committed to operating as efficiently as possible in everything we do.

Our strategy focuses on expanding our audience by engaging new audience members from different demographic groups at the Opera House, on tour, and through digital channels, while continuing to serve our loyal regulars. Our repertoire is meaningful and engaging, designed to move people and strengthen the sense of community. We believe in inclusion and active participation, locally, nationally and internationally. We also carry our societal responsibility in full, acting in socially, ecologically and financially responsible ways.

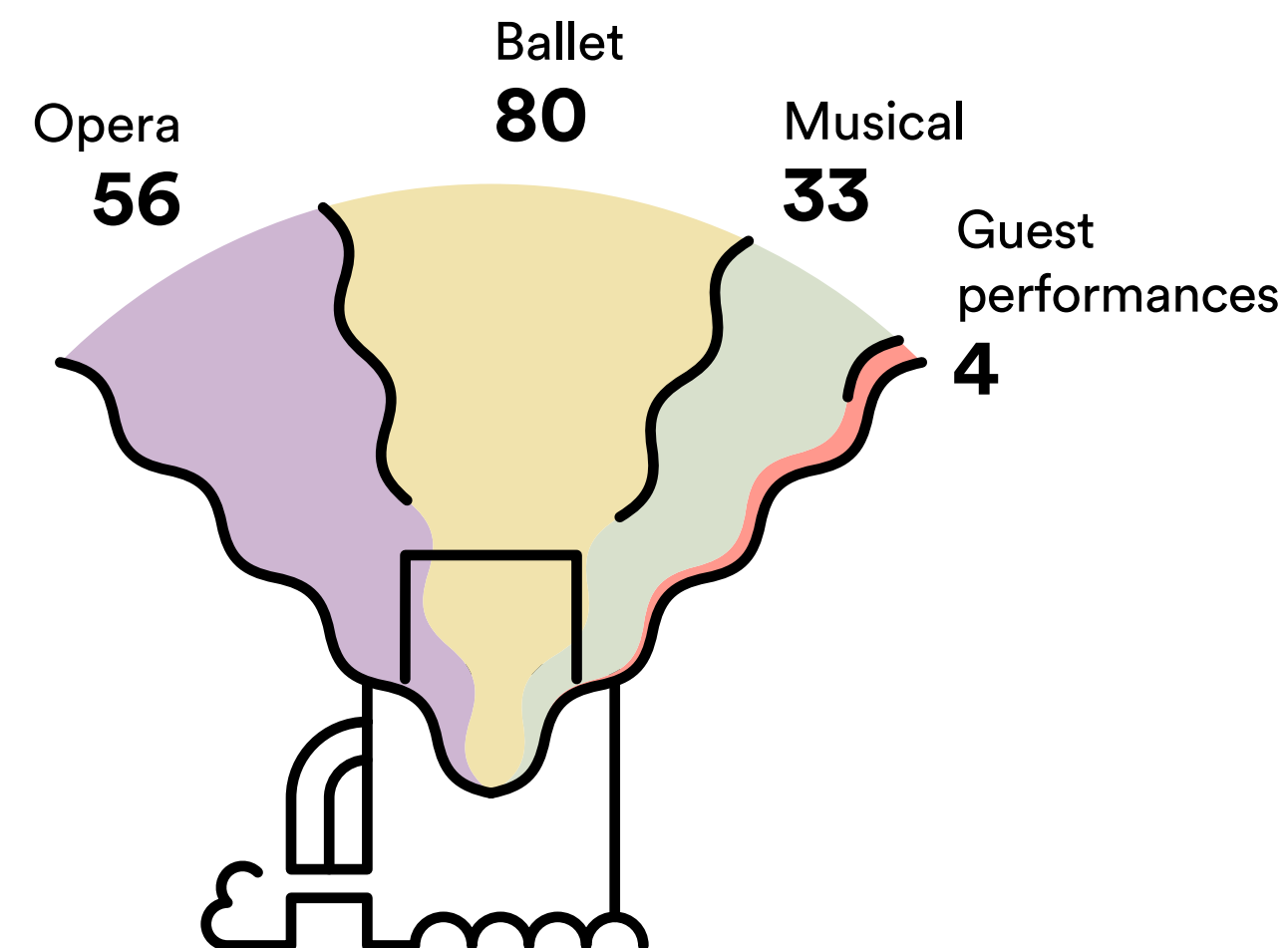
Costume production for the ballet *Édith Piaf – La vie en rose* was already in full swing in autumn 2024, six months ahead of the premiere.



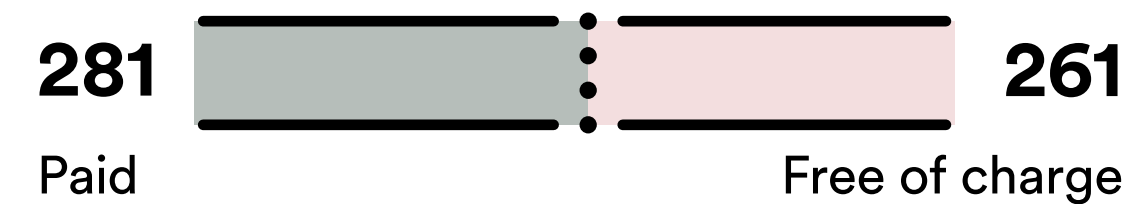
# 2024 in numbers

The Finnish National Opera and Ballet reached a total audience of 0.7 million through all its channels. We staged more than 1,000 performances and events in 33 locations. We are an arts institution for all.

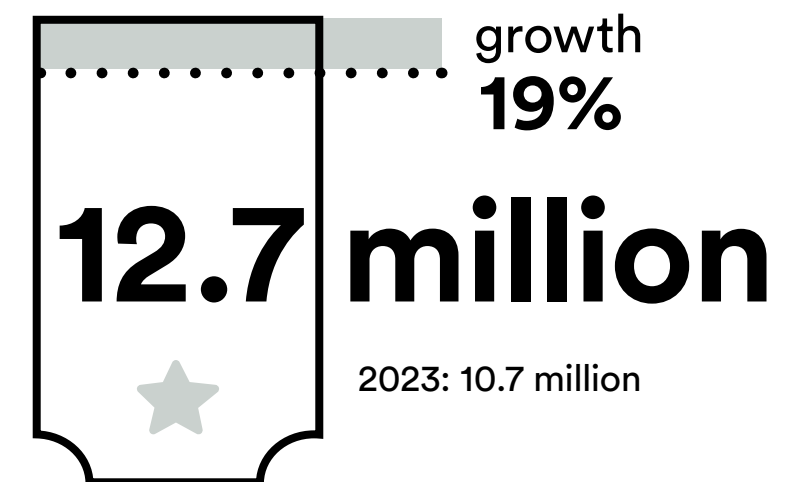
## PAID PERFORMANCES ON THE MAIN STAGE



## ALL PERFORMANCES

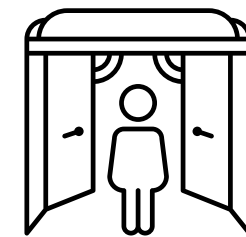


## TICKET SALES



## FIRST-TIME TICKET BUYERS

**36%**



## RETURNING FIRST-TIMERS

**19%**

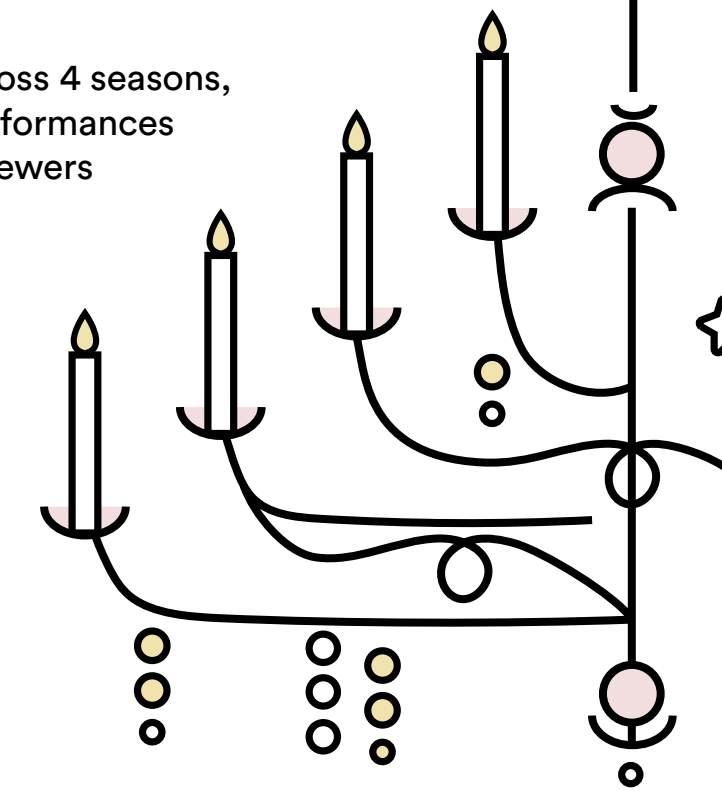
## AUDIENCE FAVORITE

The Phantom of the Opera

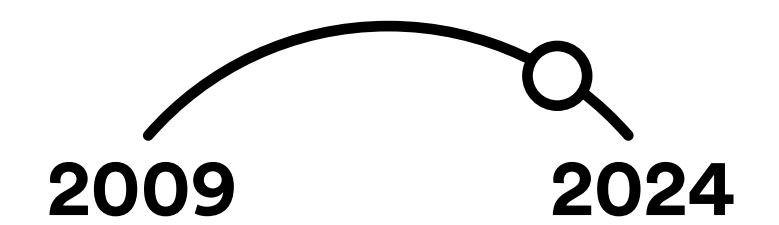
**33** sold-out performances

**44,252** viewers

Performed across 4 seasons, overall 160 performances with 214,221 viewers



## DEVELOPMENT IN ELECTRICITY, HEATING AND WATER CONSUMPTION



Electricity consumption

**-40%**

District heat consumption

**-55%**

Water consumption

**-45%**

## PERSONNEL AND PERFORMANCE

**542**

PERMANENT EMPLOYEES

2023: 542

**33**

NATIONALITIES

34

**85%**

OCCUPANCY RATE

89%

**247,939**

VISITORS

238 886

**0.7**

MILLION AUDIENCE MEMBERS

1.7 million

Message from General Director **Gita Kadambi**



# Opera and ballet belong to everyone

– our new strategy puts wider audiences at its heart

The defining theme of 2024 at the Finnish National Opera and Ballet was the development of our new strategy. It is guided by the vision of “Opera and Ballet for All”, which means we want to be more present and more open to people. At the centre of our work are our new and existing audiences. The threshold for experiencing opera and ballet should be as low as possible, and in the future we aim to reach even more people across Finland, both digitally and in person. It is important to us that our work remains meaningful within the society around us.

We have already begun to move towards new audiences. Our strategic indicators now focus on monitoring this shift, for example by tracking the

number of first-time visitors and how many of them return. Last autumn, our personnel also contributed to the strategy work in department-specific workshops, exploring what the new vision could mean in practice and how it might affect their own roles.

We are also renewing the strategy behind our audience outreach activities. As part of this, some long-running projects have been discontinued to make room for new ones. The same applies to several of our internal processes. Externally, these changes will be reflected in more diverse use of our stages. We now have more room in the calendar for a broader range of performances, making fuller use of our remarkable building.



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One example of this was **Juha Tapio's** sold-out concerts early in the year, for which the Opera House was hired as a venue.

In terms of finances, the long-awaited index adjustments were received with joy and relief. Yet the era of tight budgeting is far from over. Despite the adjustments, our 2024 funding remained lower than it was in 2012, and the future is uncertain.

All in all, these are difficult times for the cultural sector. We've been following the public debate surrounding arts and culture funding with growing concern. Pressure to cut costs is visible across society. While such pressures are understandable in the current economic climate, the impact of these cuts must be considered with care. The total amount being cut from the arts may be marginal in terms of the state budget, yet the damage to the sector can be profound. Beyond its inherent value, culture plays a vital role in wellbeing and resilience. I see it as my mission to fight for the entire cultural field. If cuts are used to dismantle the arts sector's infrastructure now, it won't be easy to rebuild it when better times return.



"The immensity of Wagner's music must be matched by the staging."  
– Anna Kelo, director of the Ring cycle performed from 2019 to 2024.



According to estimates, Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986) has been seen by more than 140 million people, making it the most popular musical in the world.

Our productions in 2024 brought many memorable moments. One of them was the long-awaited premiere of *Götterdämmerung*, the final part of **Wagner's Ring cycle**, which had been postponed several times due to the pandemic and finally made it to the stage in May. Another major highlight was *The Phantom of the Opera*, performed for the fourth time in our repertoire and gaining 33 completely sold-out performances. Other standout productions included the deeply philosophical



John Neumeier's dance work *Death in Venice*, based on Thomas Mann's (1875–1955) novella, portrays a devoted choreographer who confronts a hidden part of himself and discovers a pure love within.

them was the sustainability award received at the International Opera Awards gala in Munich, where the jury commended our adoption of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and our commitment to embedding responsibility across the entire organisation. This international recognition feels especially meaningful, as we've worked long and hard on sustainability within our institution. One of our latest initiatives is a new policy introduced in autumn 2024: at the start of every opera production rehearsal period, an intimacy coordinator now meets with the entire team to establish psychologically safe working practices. A formal intimacy policy is also being prepared. It's essential that every performer in every production feels safe and comfortable.

What continues to bring the greatest joy and inspiration to our work are our people. Our dedicated professionals carry out their tasks with extraordinary passion and perseverance in all circumstances, which has also been noted by visiting directors. We have a wonderful community we can all be proud of. This strong team spirit is a tremendous asset, fuelling each and every day. I fully intend to nurture it in the years to come.

opera *Dialogues des Carmélites*, **Jorma Elo's** award-winning ballet *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and **John Neumeier's** magnificent dance premiere, *Death in Venice*. Almi Hall also hosted a range of stunning works, including the Ballet School's enchanting Christmas performances.

2024 was also a year of major recognition and awards for the Finnish National Opera and Ballet, each one a source of pride and joy. Among



# Responsibility and strategy go hand in hand





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The Finnish National Opera and Ballet's new strategy for 2025–2028 is built around our core values, of which one is responsibility. This commitment is clearly reflected in every part of the new strategy.



Our repertoire is designed to be both emotionally engaging and meaningful. The stories we tell stir emotions and strengthen a sense of connection.



We are present and open to all. We value our loyal audiences while working to reach broader audiences at the Opera House, on tour, and through digital platforms.



We encourage community participation and collaborate locally, nationally, and internationally.



We are a strong societal player in Finland. We act in a socially, ecologically, and financially responsible way.

Communications Director Liisa Riekkö accepted the Sustainability Award at the Opera Awards gala held at the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich.



The Finnish National Opera and Ballet received major international recognition for its sustainability work at the International Opera Awards gala in Munich in October. The award in the Sustainability category was granted by a jury who praised our adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and our efforts to embed responsibility across the entire organisation.

Our sustainability work was further strengthened in many ways during 2024. A dedicated sustainability group promotes sustainable development within the organisation, and in autumn, its activities were expanded to cover all our departments.



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**Social responsibility:**

## Everyone is entitled to a safe workplace

In 2024, the Finnish National Opera and Ballet implemented several measures to improve the physical and psychological safety of its personnel. A large-scale fire and rescue drill was also carried out.

With 542 employees on a monthly salary in 2024, the Finnish National Opera and Ballet is a mid-sized opera and ballet company. These employees represented 33 different nationalities. In addition, 761 employees worked on an hourly or performance basis. Our personnel have over a hundred different job titles, including many specialised artisan roles. For some, the Finnish National Opera and Ballet is the only workplace in Finland where they can practise their unique craft.

**542****EMPLOYEES ON A  
MONTHLY SALARY****761****EMPLOYEES ON HOURLY  
OR PERFORMANCE-  
BASED CONTRACTS****33****NATIONALITIES**

The costume workshop showcases skill and craftsmanship in autumn 2024, preparing for the spring 2025 premiere of the ballet about Édith Piaf.







Leevi Madetoja's opera *The Ostrobothnians* premiered in 1924. A hundred years later, baritone Ville Rusanen and soprano Johanna Nylund sang in a new production at the Finnish National Opera.



The emergency drill during the dress rehearsal of *Götterdämmerung* momentarily brought the audience out into the crisp spring evening.

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## Intimacy coordination guidelines

Performers at the Finnish National Opera and Ballet often work in close physical proximity during both rehearsals and performances. A production may include sensitive or violent content, or involve children and young people alongside adult performers. To ensure the psychological and physical safety of all performers, we developed new intimacy coordination guidelines for opera productions in autumn 2024. These apply to both the rehearsal process and performances, serving as a code of conduct and a practical framework for staging. The guidelines cover all employees and guest artists involved in a production, whether during preparation, rehearsals, or live performances.

Intimacy coordinators are now present at rehearsals for opera productions.

Ballet masters at the Finnish National Ballet have also taken part in intimacy coordination training. In the future, tailored sessions will be arranged as needed for dancers and ballet masters.

A working group of ballet masters, dancers, and teachers from the Ballet School has also been developing body image guidance in collaboration with our physio team. The aim is to support dancers' overall wellbeing and create a safe working environment where everyone feels their body is respected and valued.

## Guidelines and training

During the year, we updated our Workplace Conduct Guide, which includes guidelines for appropriate behaviour in the workplace, along with instructions for both employees and supervisors on what to do if inappropriate behaviour is observed or experienced. Our goal is to ensure everyone in our organisation feels safe and understands our workplace practices. Towards the end of 2024, we also appointed our first two harassment contact persons from within our personnel. Their role is to provide advice and support both in-house and to external collaborators (such as visiting soloists, assistants, and artistic teams) in cases of inappropriate behaviour or harassment.

Throughout the year, staff have also received training on reporting and analysing near misses and workplace accidents. Based on the analysis, concrete steps have already been taken to improve safety.

During the dress rehearsal of *Götterdämmerung*, a major fire and evacuation drill was held for both audience members and staff. Afterwards, the leadership and crisis management teams carried out an emergency response simulation. Later in the year, members of the management team and other key staff also took part in the nationwide Taisto exercise, organised by the Digital and Population Data Services Agency.



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## Environmental responsibility:

# Focus on carbon footprint

As a national institution, we also take responsibility for the environment.

## Calculating the carbon footprints of sets

The transition to LED lighting has continued at the Opera House as part of ongoing replacements. Based on floor area, more than half of the building now uses LED lights, including all public and stage-related spaces.

The building is powered by renewable electricity, district heating, and district cooling. Since December, the emergency generator has also run on renewable diesel fuel instead of fossil-based alternatives.

In 2024, the Opera House introduced continuous use of a tool that calculates the carbon footprint of stage sets. Initially piloted in 2023, the tool will help lay the foundation for a future carbon budget for set design, once sufficient data has been collected.

### Scope 1



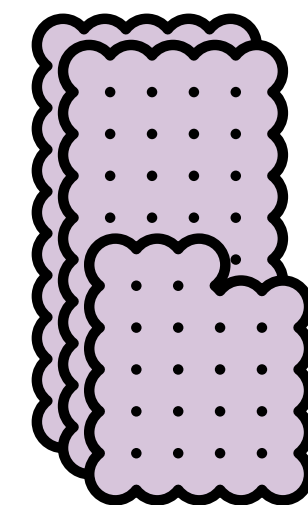
40t  
Direct  
emissions

### Scope 2



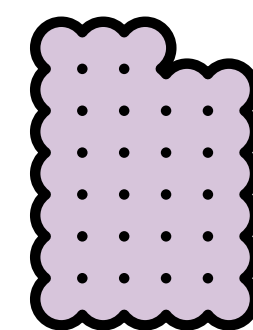
81t  
Emissions from  
purchased energy

21%



1284t  
Purchased  
goods and  
services

5%

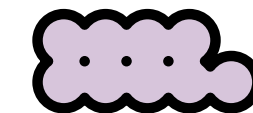


327t  
Production of  
acquired products  
and services



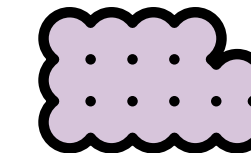
24t  
Fuel  
production and  
transmission  
losses

1,5%



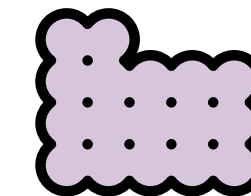
92t  
Waste and waste  
management

2,2%



138t  
Business travel

2,7%



166t  
Commuting  
to work

## Scope 3 upstream emissions

Upstream emission sources include indirect emissions generated before the delivery of the organisation's own product or service.

## Scope 3 downstream emissions

Downstream emission sources include indirect emissions generated after a product or service has been delivered to the customer.

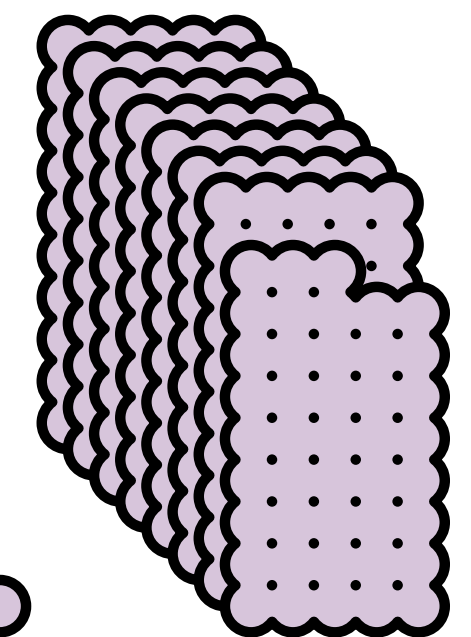
The Finnish National Opera and Ballet's carbon footprint was calculated in 2020 using data from 2019. The method used was the Greenhouse Gas Protocol (GHG Protocol), the most widely adopted international standard for measuring and reporting greenhouse gas emissions. Emissions are categorised into three classes: Scope 1, Scope 2, and Scope 3.

Scope 1: Greenhouse gas emissions generated directly from the Finnish National Opera and Ballet's own operations.

Scope 2: Emissions from the production of the energy purchased by the Finnish National Opera and Ballet.

Scope 3: Emissions generated indirectly through procurement and the value chain.

63%



3933t  
Transportation  
of audiences



55t  
Outgoing  
transportation  
and distribution  
services

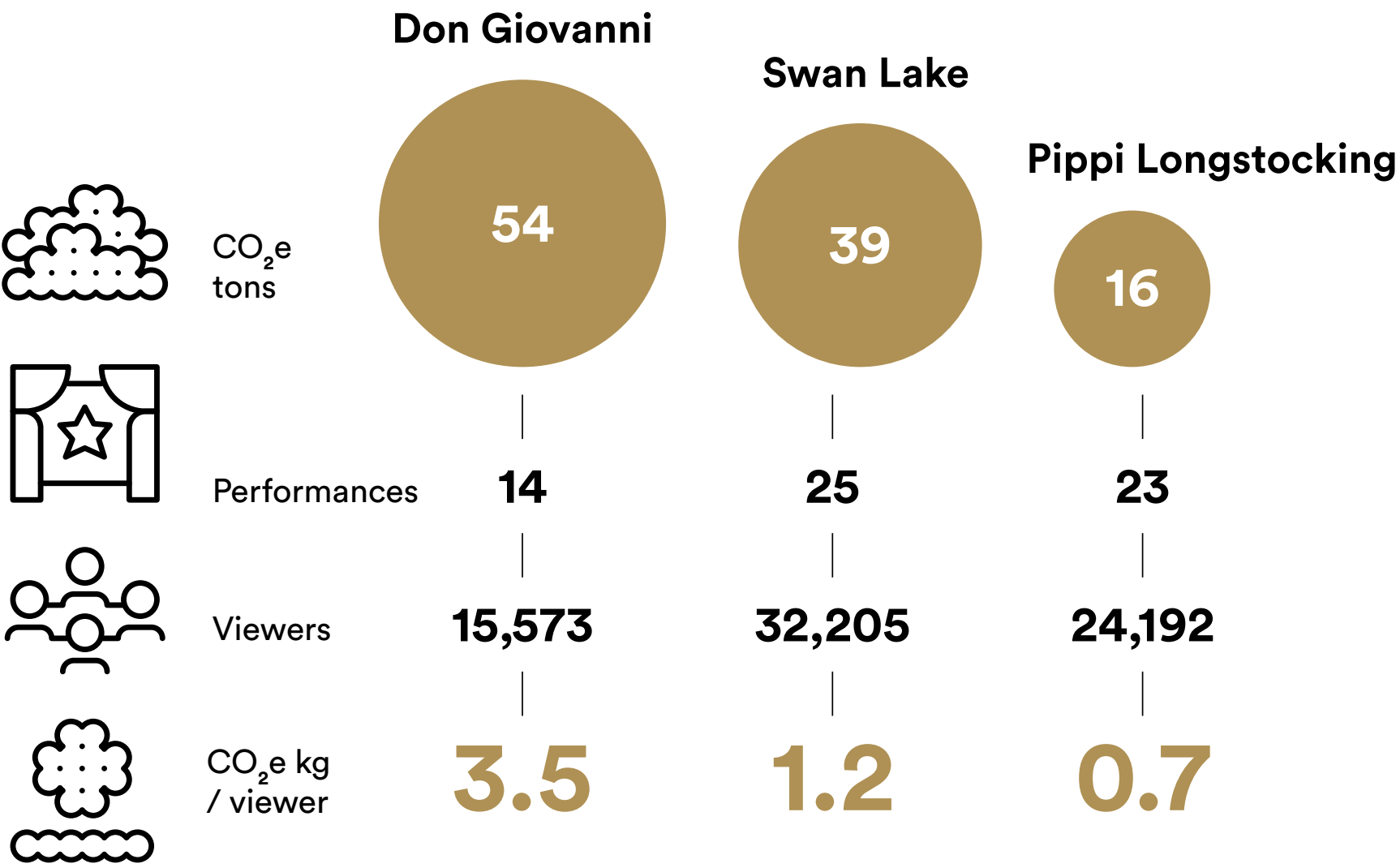


68t  
Use of sold products



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THE CARBON FOOTPRINT OF STAGE MATERIALS



The largest share of emissions from the Finnish National Opera and Ballet’s own operations comes from purchased goods and services. Metals from set construction are recycled wherever they can be dismantled from the structures. We are also exploring the opportunity to use prefabricated wooden components, already adopted by the construction industry, in our stage sets. The highest stage-related carbon emissions are caused by electronic equipment, which accounts for roughly five times the carbon footprint of metals used in set building.

Recycling theme in the Stardust school opera

*With the school opera Stardust, we introduced a new approach to stage design. Most materials for the production were sourced from Pääkaupunkiseudun kierrätyskeskus, a local recycling centre, complemented by modular standard components.*

*We repurposed fabrics, plywood, paints, metals, wood, costumes, and props from our storage facilities, including items such as gym balls and mobile phone cases. In addition, 80 kilograms of clothing, accessories, chairs, and small plastic goods were purchased second-hand from the recycling centre. With the help of their circular economy calculator, we were able to assess the effect of sourcing second-hand products and materials on natural resource use and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.*

*Had we purchased new products instead, acquiring and processing their materials would have required approximately 1,000 kilograms of natural resources and generated around 270 kilograms of carbon dioxide emissions. The amount of natural resources saved corresponds to the average daily direct consumption of ten Finns. The emissions avoided equate to a car journey of 1,900 kilometres, roughly the round trip from Helsinki to Rovaniemi.*

[Read more about the school opera on our website](#)



-1,000 kg  
NATURAL RESOURCES

- 270  
CO<sub>2</sub>e KG

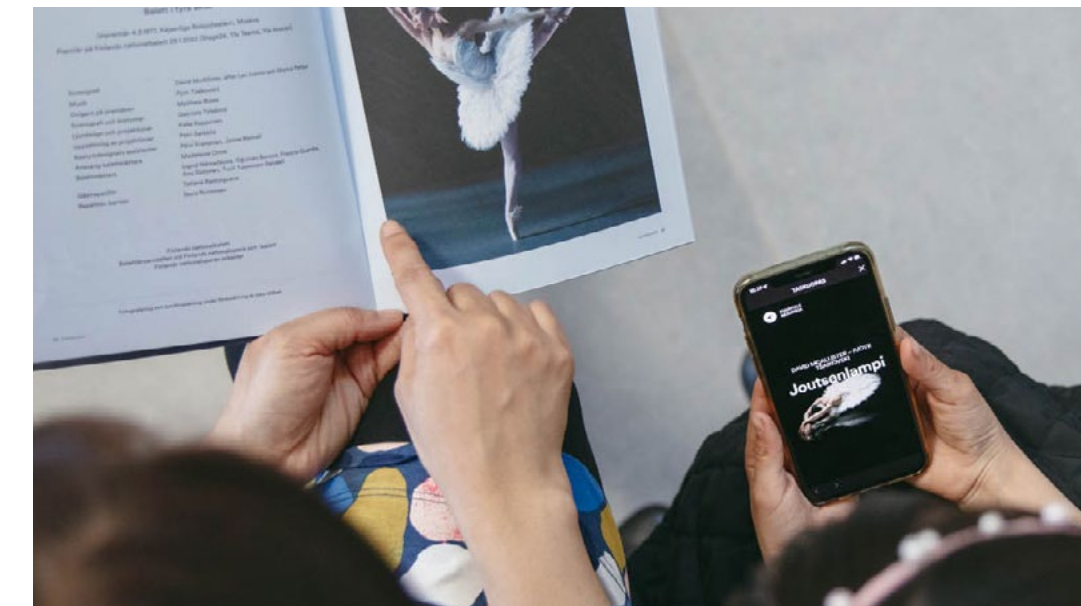


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## Microforest and meadow landscaping

In summer 2024, Senate Properties, which manages state-owned real estate, established a microforest on the grounds of the Opera House in collaboration with the Finnish National Opera and Ballet. This is one of the first of its kind in Finland. Some of the Opera House's lawns were also turned into meadows to promote biodiversity.

Around 50 trees and 60 shrubs were planted in the microforest, as well as various kinds of undergrowth and mosses. The forest absorbs stormwater effectively, sequesters carbon and airborne pollutants, and provides a habitat for



The printed version will continue to be produced alongside the digital list throughout the 2024–2025 season.

many species of insects and birds. The creation of meadows, in turn, complements the diminished natural habitats of insect species in Finland.

## Digital cast sheets

In autumn 2024, we began providing digital cast lists for each performance, alongside the traditional printed sheets.

The digital cast list is published online six hours before the performance, and ticket holders receive a link to it in a welcome email. The list is also available on the new touchscreen displays in the Opera House foyers.



The microforest is based on a method developed by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki (1928–2021). It involves planting a miniature forest in a small urban space, typically consisting of a full ecosystem from trees to mosses. Photo: Senate Properties

## The XR Stage concept goes global

*At the end of 2024, the Finnish National Opera and Ballet sold the rights to its innovative XR Stage tool for stage design to Finnish AI company Younite. The two aim to establish XR Stage as a global standard in stage and production design for the performing arts.*

*Virtual stage environments developed with this concept are already in use at opera houses in Sweden, Chile, and Bulgaria. Benefits of XR Stage include a reduced carbon footprint, lower costs, and improved artistic and operational quality.*

*The development and design of XR Stage has been granted structural support for the renewal of culture and creative industries from the EU's Next Generation programme for sustainable growth. Future developments will include applications for audience safety and accessibility. The aim is to expand the tool's use from the stage to the auditorium and foyer spaces, to better serve diverse audiences and communities.*



In the 2023 production of *Turandot*, the set design featured an immersive behind-the-scenes technology solution. This marked the first time the XR Stage concept was applied in the international opera world from the proof-of-concept stage all the way to the final production.

The virtual stage concept significantly reduced material and labour costs compared to traditional set design and production methods.



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**Good governance:**

## Responsible investing and procurement

In 2024, actions under good governance included the partial transfer of investments to a climate portfolio and the creation of guidelines for responsible procurement.

The Finnish National Opera and Ballet, which operates primarily with state funding, received an index adjustment to its appropriations in 2024. This was the first adjustment since 2012. The statutory increase improved our financial position and enables us to continue developing while fulfilling our responsibilities as a publicly funded national arts institution.

**Responsible investments**

The Finnish National Opera and Ballet adheres to the UN Principles for Responsible Investment in all its investment activities. At the start of 2024, a portion of our investments was transferred to a climate portfolio, with further funds allocated in early 2025. The climate portfolio places greater emphasis on financing climate solutions and supporting the transition to a low-carbon society.

**Guidelines for responsible procurement**

The Finnish National Opera and Ballet's responsible procurement guidelines were introduced in 2024. The first step in any procurement is a responsible assessment of need. This means considering whether the planned purchase is truly necessary, or if the need could be met in another way.

All our procurement activities, from small-scale purchases to public tenders, are governed by responsibility criteria. These apply both to mandatory minimum requirements and to overall cost-effectiveness. Some suppliers have been added to a prohibited vendor list, including online retailers such as Temu and Shein.

Environmental factors are also considered in the procurement process. This includes, for example, the recycling and repurposing of materials and goods.



In opera and ballet productions, we aim to recycle, adapt, and reuse as many existing costumes and other wardrobe items as possible. Brand-new garments are only purchased when absolutely necessary.



# Main Stage performances and much more

We want people in Finland to feel that the Finnish National Opera and Ballet belongs to them. Audience outreach plays a vital role in achieving this goal. Another clear aim of our new strategy is to make the Opera House more open and welcoming than ever before. In the future, it will host much more than just opera and ballet performances. We have already made progress in this direction: in 2024, venue rentals reached their highest level to date.

Hair and make-up artist Virpi Ketko uses her expertise to transform étoile dancer Sergei Popov into Scrooge for the ballet *A Christmas Carol*.



## AUDIENCES



247,939

VISITORS TO OUR  
PERFORMANCES

13,712

ATTENDEES

(Audience outreach projects  
and workshops, guided tours of  
the Opera House, pre-performance  
insights and introductory talks)



445,558

DIGITAL AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENTS

(Stage24 content, radio, and TV)

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## Social impact and active cooperation

2024 was a busy year for advocacy. We met with government leaders, parliamentary groups, and youth wings of political parties. Advocacy plays an important role in increasing decision-makers' understanding of our work. During the year, we also registered with the transparency register maintained by the Ministry of Justice, where meetings with governmental actors are recorded.

As part of our advocacy efforts, we actively contributed to the preparation of a new cultural policy report that aligns with our values. Although the report is still a draft, we have had the opportunity to present our views.

We maintained active and reciprocal collaboration with cities throughout the year. A key focus of our municipal partnerships was on children and young people, who took part in a wide range of events and independent artistic activities. The Finnish National Ballet's visit to the Dance Day gala celebrating the City of Vantaa's 50th anniversary

in April, and the Orchestra of the Finnish National Opera performing at the Espoo Organ Night & Aria Festival in August, are just two examples of such cooperation.

In 2024, we also embarked on renewing our audience outreach strategy, some of which is already taking shape. In collaboration with the City of Helsinki, we will begin a project called Cultural Godchildren in 2026. All children born in 2026 will be invited to become godchildren of the Finnish National Opera and Ballet. Each will receive an annual invitation to two free cultural events before they reach school age.

Alongside our domestic partnerships, international connections are also important to us. Besides Nordic countries, we aim to strengthen our ties across Europe. One such occasion was the visit hosted by General Director **Gita Kadambi** for the heads of national opera companies from the Baltic countries in Helsinki in April.



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## Opera and ballet experiences within everyone's reach

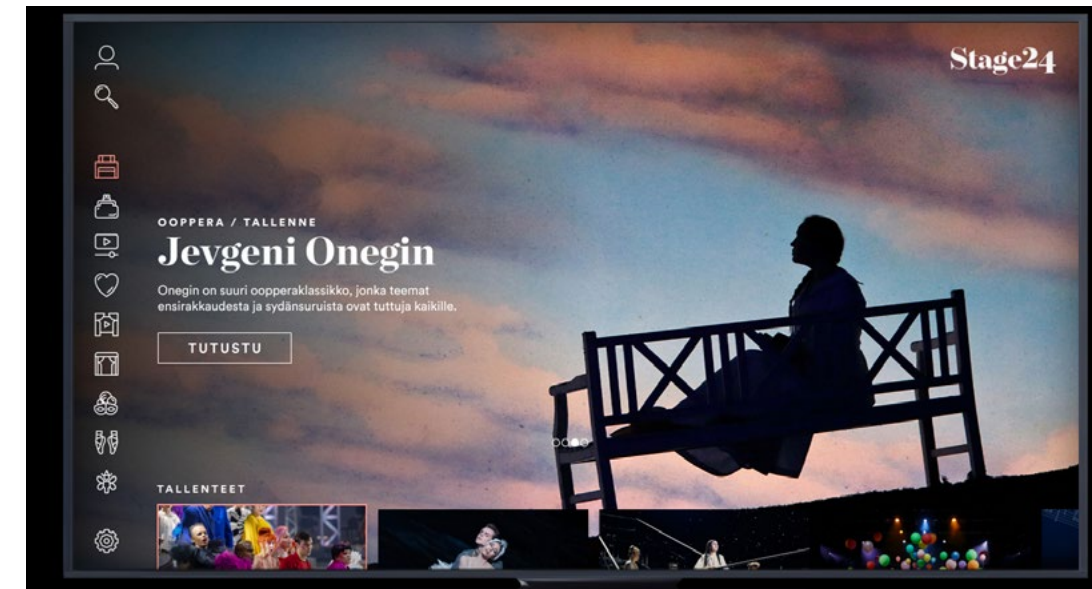
In 2024, a total of 707,649 people attended our performances, events, and workshops, while our digital content reached 445,558 users. Thanks to Stage24 on our website, anyone can enjoy opera and ballet experiences online. New technology will make digital art even more impressive in the years to come.

Reserving accessible seating became easier as online booking was made available from April 2024 onwards, once tickets for the 2024–2025 season went on sale. We also worked to improve accessibility by interpreting two performances of the opera *Eugene Onegin* and two performances of *The Phantom of the Opera* into Finnish Sign Language.

Directing the recording of the Ballet School's performance of *Sleeping Beauty* in December 2024.

The Stage24 smart TV app is the most convenient way to enjoy the service on the big screen. You can learn more about how to use Stage24 on our website.

[Explore the use of the Stage24 service on our website](#)



## Award-winning Stage24 smart TV app

In March 2024, we launched a new smart TV app for our Stage24 service on the most popular domestic smart TV platforms. The app enables us to provide customers with an even higher-quality experience. Its user-friendly interface makes it easy to log in, view content, and purchase viewing rights.

As of spring 2024, some of Stage24's live streams and performance recordings were placed behind a paywall, though the service continues to offer free content too. The first two paid live streams were *Dracula* and *Simon Boccanegra*. In September 2024, the Stage24 smart TV app received recognition at the prestigious CSI Awards, where it won in the Best TV App category.

## XTREME brings culture into your living room

The XTREME project, funded by the EU's Horizon Europe programme, was launched in January 2024. The initiative explores how new technologies and arts organisations can jointly create new types of artistic experiences in an inclusive and ecologically sustainable way. At its core is the development of MR (mixed reality) technology.

The goal of the project is to use cutting-edge MR to deliver performing arts experiences directly into people's homes or other venues. Participants will enjoy an immersive experience in which 3D visuals and spatial sound blend seamlessly with their surroundings, offering a deep sense of presence – as if the viewer were physically present in a concert hall, museum, or theatre. The Finnish National Opera and Ballet is producing the artistic content for this international project.



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Passengers at Helsinki Airport can now enjoy free excerpts of music and dance at the Culture Stage, a giant screen on the wall of the airport's railway station.

## Welcome to a cultural journey! Culture Stage was opened at the airport

In autumn 2024, airport company Finavia and the Finnish National Opera and Ballet opened a window into the world of opera and ballet at Helsinki Airport. Passengers can now enjoy highlights from opera and ballet performances free of charge at the public Culture Stage. The project features a screen measuring 12 metres wide and 6.5 metres high, which shows a collection of excerpts from opera and ballet performances.

The excerpts are recordings from the Finnish National Opera and Ballet's repertoire. The first collection included scenes from the ballets *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty*, as well as the operas *Tosca*, *Turandot* and *Don Giovanni*. The performance runs for around 20 minutes and is updated regularly. Our aim is to bring our Finnish and international repertoire to a wider audience. The airport offers an excellent, and somewhat surprising, venue for just that.



The nationwide Independence Day celebration for children took place at the Opera House on 4 December. Over 500 children from across Finland gathered to celebrate and congratulate 107-year-old Finland as guests of the Prime Minister. The event was organised by the Prime Minister's Office, the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, and the Ombudsman for Children, in collaboration with the Finnish National Opera and Ballet.



Once again, the hugely popular costume and props flea market held during the Night of the Arts lived up to expectations. A cheerful crowd queued in high spirits.

## A year packed with events

In addition to opera and ballet performances, the Opera House hosted a wide range of other events in 2024. It has become the established venue for the Venla Gala and also offers an ideal setting for various concerts. Juha Tapio performed at the Opera House twice during the year, and the two traditional Epiphany Strauss concerts filled the auditorium on both occasions.

The Opera House can also serve as a venue for conferences and trade fairs. One example from last year was an international seminar for the insurance sector. On Finland's National Veterans' Day, veterans from the Helsinki metropolitan area gathered at the Opera House. The Night of the Arts in August saw the return of the popular costume and props flea market. The event also featured screenings of *Swan Lake* and *Das Rheingold* at the outdoor amphitheatre of the Opera House.



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## Projects and fundraising

In 2024, the Finnish National Opera launched Sugar Factory – New Opera Works, a three-year initiative supported by the Finnish Cultural Foundation. The project will see different artists co-create four short contemporary operas each year, with the first works to premiere in 2026. The initiative was conceived by Artistic Director of the Opera **Thomas de Mallet Burgess** to enhance diversity within opera. It's an investment in the future, which benefits audiences, the opera art form, and artists for whom opera is an entirely new form of expression.

Also supported by the Finnish Cultural Foundation, the school opera *Stardust* premiered in spring 2024. The work explored the future of humanity and the planet through the themes of sustainability and the circular economy. Performances continued into the autumn, and the opera will be staged in collaboration with 30 schools across Finland during the 2024–2025 season.

In August 2024, the Orchestra of the FNO launched a new concert series at Musiikkitalo in Helsinki. The two-year series is made possible by the financial support of **Hannele** and **Henrik von Wendt**.

School opera projects are designed to encourage pupils to sing, build self-awareness and social skills, introduce opera as an art form, and offer an inspiring and empowering experience through collaboration.



The 2024–2025 season will comprise four concerts by the Orchestra of the FNO at Musiikkitalo in Helsinki. The featured soloists are Karita Mattila, soprano Kristine Opolais, tenor Joseph Calleja, bass-baritone Johan Reuter, and bass Mika Kares. The photo is from the rehearsal room of the orchestra.



The Young Singers' Programme was created to support the professional development of opera singers. It was launched in collaboration with the Louise and Göran Ehrnrooth Foundation.

For the 2024–2025 season, the programme's singers are Elisaveta Rimkevitch, Jussi Vääntinen, and Iris Candelaria.

[Learn more about the Young Singers' Programme on our website](#)

Two important EU-funded projects continued with renewed funding: FEDORA's Next Stage and Opera Europa's Next Generation Platform, which both play a significant role in advancing the opera art form.

A key part of our fundraising efforts is the continuation of our collaboration with Evli for 2024–2026. This partnership focuses on delivering high-quality experiences that elevate everyday life.

The Young Singers' Programme, generously supported by the Louise and Göran Ehrnrooth

Foundation, continued in 2024. This season's singers are **Iris Candelaria**, **Elisaveta Rimkevitch** and **Jussi Vääntinen**.

The Ballet Energy for Children workshops for pupils in their first year of school, supported by the Jane and Aatos Erkko Foundation, toured Finland for the last time in 2024. The Youth Company of the Finnish National Ballet, also funded by the foundation, continued its activities with 15 young dancers. In December, we received the wonderful news that the project will continue through to 2028.



Thomas de Mallet Burgess

# Opera that evolves with the times



This is a fascinating moment for opera as an art form. Around the world, people are beginning to look at opera with fresh eyes and rethink what it can be. In many ways, opera is undergoing a kind of rebirth.

From a repertoire perspective, this means finding a balance between beloved opera classics and the commissioning and development of new contemporary works. Contemporary pieces explore themes that feel urgent and relevant. This aligns closely with our strategy: opera is for everyone, not just a narrow segment of society.

This is already reflected in our 2025–2026 season. My goal is to include two contemporary operas in every season. The first will be *Festen* by **Mark-Anthony Turnage**. The second, *Morgonstjärnan – The Morning Star* has been commissioned by **Lilli Paasikivi** and I will direct it myself.

Not everyone wants to spend hours at the opera. This is why our repertoire will also feature shorter works without an interval.

Creating new works is absolutely essential. That's why I developed the idea of an opera laboratory to explore how new opera is written, who it is for, and what it can be about. We will challenge our composers, writers, directors and dramaturgs to create work that is relevant, contemporary, and speaks directly to audiences. The aim is to invite in new people alongside those who already know the power of opera. The initiative is called Sugar Factory – New Works for Opera, and we've received a significant grant from the Finnish Cultural Foundation to support it.

I also want to explore how we can involve audiences in the creative process itself. One example is *Iolanta*, featured in our 2025–2026 season, which centres on a blind protagonist. From the outset, we have worked with a group of blind and visually impaired people – not only to ensure meaningful representation, but also to learn from them how we can make both our spaces and our art more accessible.



Javier Torres

# The art of emotions



Our new strategy is also evident in the ballet repertoire. Classical ballet still has its place, but we also acknowledge the changes that have taken place in society. Ballet, like any art form, is a kind of mirror for the world around it, and we must adapt to what feels relevant and meaningful today.

The strategy gives us an opportunity to think differently: how can we do what we've done before, but from a new angle or with a fresh approach? We must never compromise on artistic quality, as our audiences expect excellence.

Relevance is essential for attracting new ballet audiences. As Artistic Director, I need to consider what to include in the repertoire, what I want to bring in, and why right now. Our audience expects classical ballet, so for an institution like ours, turning *Swan Lake* into something ultra-modern would be difficult.

However, for younger audiences, a more contemporary ballet can be the spark that inspires them to come and see a classical masterpiece next. In the upcoming season, we will stage a true classic. The essence remains, but the story has

been updated to better reflect the world we live in and to help audiences connect with it more easily.

Over the past year, we also updated our body image guidance. We want to foster a community where bodies are spoken about respectfully, because of the psychological and emotional impact body image has across our organisation. The ideal of being thin belongs in the past, and in my position, I'm responsible for ensuring the performers on our stage feel both healthy and well.

I also want to highlight the role of our Ballet School and Youth Company. We have further developed, in fact completely restructured, the training provided by the Ballet School. Teachers now collaborate more closely, and our methods are more consistent than before. Our goal is to build an even stronger school, although unfortunately the economic situation and budget cuts are also affecting this work. The Youth Company, which had 15 dancers in 2024, has been supported by the Jane and Aatos Erkkö Foundation for 11 years. The group typically stages one or two of its own productions per year, and its contribution to Main Stage performances is highly significant.





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