

22 JANUARY 2026

Hordern Pavilion



SYDNEY SYMPHONY PRESENTS

DISCO NEVER DIES



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«SYDNEY»
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2026 CONCERT SEASON

DISCO NEVER DIES

SYDNEY SYMPHONY PRESENTS

Carlo Antonioli conductor
Kween Kong host
Paulini vocals
Emma Donovan vocals
Jess Hitchcock vocals
Jesse Dutlow vocals
Dyagula backing vocals
nik. backing vocals
Alwyn De Los Santos backing vocals
Er@Ser Description
David Goodwin keys/piano
Jack Strempel Moog
Alexander Flood drums

ACT 1

A Fifth of Beethoven
Dancing Queen
You Should Be Dancing
Le Freak
I Love the Night life
Touch Me in the Morning
Michael Jackson Medley
Hot Stuff
Crying at the Discotheque
I'm Every Woman

INTERVAL

ACT 2

Boney M Medley
Lady Marmalade
Boogie Wonderland
All Night Long
Gimme Love
It's Raining Men
That's the Way (I Like It)
Don't Leave Me This Way
Celebration

Thursday 22 January, 7pm

Hordern Pavillion

Estimated duration

The concert will run for
approx. 2 hours

Cover image

Image by Rebecca Shaw

Audio

Des O'Neil, aFX Global

Lighting

Matthew Tunchon,
Silver Bullet Projects

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

KWEEN KONG host

Thomas Charles Fonua, internationally known as Kween Kong, is a Samoan–Tongan interdisciplinary artist, choreographer, cultural strategist and community leader whose practice bridges contemporary performance, Pacific cultural knowledge, queer liberation and artistic sovereignty.

Raised in South Auckland within a strong Pacific community, Fonua was influenced early by matriarchal leadership, collective identity and embodied cultural knowledge. He began dancing at the age of seven and trained with New Zealand’s renowned contemporary dance company Black Grace, where he later became a principal dancer and toured extensively across Asia, Europe, North America and Oceania. He went on to join Australian Dance Theatre as a principal artist for seven years, evolving a movement practice that combines physical precision, ancestral memory and narrative rigor.

Alongside his contemporary dance career, Fonua developed the performance persona Kween Kong — a sovereign embodiment of cultural strength, humour, discipline and unapologetic Pacific presence. As Kween Kong, he rose to global prominence as a finalist on *RuPaul’s Drag Race Down Under* (Season 2), later representing Oceania on *Drag Race Global All Stars* (2024). His performances are known for their explosive physicality, theatrical clarity and deep cultural grounding, frequently drawing on themes of diaspora, legacy, identity and collective survival.

Fonua holds a Bachelor of Business (Economics) from AUT University and a Master of Business(Cultural Leadership) from the University of South Australia. This academic foundation informs his work in cultural governance, institutional navigation and Indigenous-centred leadership, ensuring that his artistic contribution is supported by strategic insight and principled purpose.

Central to Fonua’s leadership is the Haus of Kong, a performance and community collective that provides mentorship, family structure and artistic development for Pacific and First Nations queer youth, emerging drag performers and ballroom community members. The Haus serves not only as a creative network but as a cultural intervention — countering erasure, disconnection and systemic marginalisation with belonging, ceremony and embodied pride. Fonua’s contributions have been recognised through major accolades including the Prime Minister’s Pacific Youth Award for Arts and Creativity (2014), Miss Drag Nation Australia (2019), Coming Out Australia 30 Under 30 (2019) and the *Pedestrian Television Queer Excellence Award* (2024). His work continues to expand the visibility of Pasifika queer identity on global stages, while cultivating spaces where future generations can thrive without apology. Through drag, dance, ceremony, mentorship and cultural strategy, Thomas Charles Fonua stands as a leader shaping new artistic futures where Pacific queer identity is not only present — it is central, sovereign and celebrated.



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Paulini vocals

Paulini has been heralded as one of the finest vocalists and performers to come out of Australia. The Fijian born songstress rose to fame through television screens on the very first season of *Australian Idol* which thrust her into the spotlight. Making it through to the final four, she won the hearts of a nation with her angelic, five octave range, and engaging personality.

Post-*Idol*, Paulini rose to the top of the Australian ARIA Charts in 2004 with her debut Platinum album *One Determined Heart* and her Platinum smash single 'Angel Eyes', both hitting the #1 spot and receiving ARIA Number 1 Chart Awards ('Angel Eyes' remained at the top of the charts for six consecutive weeks). In fact, Paulini is still one of only ten Australian female solo artists to have a #1 album debut on the Australian ARIA Charts.

In 2006, Paulini went on to become a part of the chart-topping Young Divas. Her powerful vocals were perfect for the disco classics and the group went on to have two top 10 albums and two top ten singles.

After leaving the girl group Paulini grew as a performer, a songwriter and as a woman, steering her own destiny in her music career and making choices that she truly feels great about.

In 2017 Paulini played the lead role as Rachel Marron in *The Bodyguard Musical* to great critical acclaim, singing 17 Whitney Houston tracks every night.

After *The Bodyguard*, Paulini joined the *Saturday Night Fever* cast as a lead vocalist, followed by another lead role as Dionne in the 50th anniversary of *Hair* in 2019.

Paulini returned to television in 2019 in the hit show *The Masked Singer*. As Spider she wowed the judges weekly using her amazing voice to change genres easily, which kept the judges guessing.

In 2021 Paulini appeared on *I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here Australia* and in the Australian tour of *Chess* the musical.

2022 saw Paulini compete in *Eurovision Australia Decides* which coincided with her latest single 'We Are One'. In 2023 we watched Paulini grace our television screens once again this time competing for the mirrorball trophy on *Dancing with the Stars*!

Most recently though in 2024 you may have seen Paulini performing as the Teen Angel in *Grease*.



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Emma Donovan vocals

Emma Donovan is a celebrated Aboriginal Australian singer and songwriter, known for her powerful voice and heartfelt storytelling. A proud Gumbaynggirr and Noongar woman, Emma began her musical journey at the age of seven, performing with her family's band, The Donovans. She later co-founded the Indigenous trio Stiff Gins and released her solo album *Changes* in 2004.

Emma's collaboration with Melbourne rhythm combo The Putbacks has been particularly impactful, resulting in critically acclaimed albums such as *Dawn* (2014), *Crossover* (2020), and her latest release, *Til My Song is Done* (2024), which was nominated for an ARIA Award. Their work has earned multiple accolades, including Best Soul, Funk, R&B or Gospel Act, Best Group, and Best Album at the 2021 Music Victoria Awards.

Beyond her recordings, Emma has performed at numerous festivals and events across Australia, including the Big Jazz Day Out at Monash University. She has also collaborated with esteemed artists like Paul Kelly, The Teskey Brothers, Paul Grabowsky, Spinifex Gum, and the late Archie Roach and Ruby Hunter.

In 2025, Emma launched her new project, *Take Me To The River*, at the Darwin Festival. This show pays tribute to the Black American artists who have influenced her journey, reimagined through an Australian lens.

Emma Donovan's music is deeply rooted in her cultural heritage, often featuring songs in Gumbaynggirr and Noongar languages. Her work continues to inspire and resonate, making her a vital voice in Australia's musical landscape.



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Jess Hitchcock vocals

Jess Hitchcock captivates audiences with her powerful voice and evocative storytelling. A singer-songwriter with a unique blend of pop, country, folk, and opera, Jess crafts an enchanting style of song that resonates in its unique sound.

Jess is currently working on a new album while composing an opera, both of which promise to showcase her creative evolution, reaching into multiple genres and transporting listeners through the worlds of her songs.

Jess’s connection to her family throughout the Torres Strait, Papua New Guinea and the Pacific drive her passion to create and advocate for a more just world. With her unique artistry as a genre-defying songwriter and performer, Jess Hitchcock stands out as a distinctive figure in contemporary music.



Photo by Claudio Raschella

Jesse Dutlow vocals

Jesse Dutlow (they/them) is an Australian non-binary singer and actor. They were born and raised in Melbourne and are proud of their South African heritage. A versatile vocalist known for their rich tone and expressive musicality, Jesse is most known for their work in musical theatre.

Most recently, Jesse performed the iconic role of Angel in *Rent* with Opera Australia at the Sydney Opera House. Prior to this, they toured Australia and Asia as May in *& Juliet* with Michael Cassel Group. Their other theatre credits include *Fangirls* (Belvoir and Sydney Opera House).

As a recording artist, Jesse was featured as a semi-finalist on *The Voice Australia* (Season 6). They have also released original music including ‘Powerless’, ‘Soaked’ and their debut EP, *XX*, blending pop and gospel influences with a distinctive contemporary sound.

Jesse continues to build a career defined by strong storytelling, vocal agility, and an authentic artistic voice. Jesse is a proud member of Actors Equity since 2025.

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Dyagula backing vocals

Dyagula (Wiradjuri | Gamilaraay | Ngunawal | Walgalu) is a powerful Songwoman, multi-genre vocalist, composer, producer and sonic architect redefining Australian music through language, story and spirit.

Dyagula's voice and compositions span contemporary, classical, and traditional forms. She has performed and recorded for Archie Roach, Christine Anu, Electric Fields, Emily Wurramara, Emma Donovan, Dan Sultan and Thelma Houston and performed on Triple J's *Like A Version* four times with different First Nations artists.

From Lead Songwoman at Dhuluny Corroboree 2024 to her Wiradjuri-language rendition of Bob Dylan's 'To Make You Feel My Love' on ABC's *The Piano* that went viral to over a million global viewers, Dyagula continues to affirm her place as a leading voice in First Nations language revival.

An accomplished performer in musical theatre, Dyagula was the first Aboriginal person to play a POC lead role in Australian musical theatre. She is also one-third of critically acclaimed electro-soul trio Bow and Arrow.

Through her work, Dyagula continues to shape a powerful cultural and sonic legacy – merging ancient resonance with modern expression and carrying the spirit of her Ancestors into new soundscapes for generations to come.



nik. backing vocals

Blending ethereal dark pop with soulful R&B, Sydney artist nik.'s fusion of evocative lyricism, mesmerising melodies and lush production delivers an enchanting sonic tapestry, that weaves seamlessly into your heartstrings. Fuelled by an addiction to coffee and a lust for travel, nik.'s unapologetic vulnerability and soul-stirring tone invites you on a musical adventure into her soul, guided by haunting storytelling and the resonating emotion of déjà vu induced by a vivid dream.

For nik., singing is not just about creating music, but a boundless realm where she explores her identity and navigates life's complexities.

Completing a Bachelor in Contemporary Music from Macquarie University, nik. has over a decade of experience in performance, musical theatre, fronted a regional tour of Australia's number one Fleetwood Mac cover band Running in the Shadows as 'Christine McVie', performs regularly for public, private and corporate events, and worked for ten years as a vocal instructor and band coordinator for all ages, bringing a wealth of expertise and artistry to her craft.



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Alwyn De Los Santos backing vocals

Alwyn De Los Santos is a distinguished vocalist, performer, and vocal instructor whose versatility and professional artistry have established him as a respected name in the Australian and international music scene.

His credits include performances with Ngaiire and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Triple J's *Like A Version* and major festivals such as WOMADelaide and Garma.

With extensive touring experience across Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Papua New Guinea, Alwyn brings a refined musicianship, vocal precision, and creative depth that continue to define his work both on stage and in the studio.



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Er@Ser Description

In 2016, three jazz students (David Goodwin, Alexander Flood and Jack Strempel), sharing a passion for synthesisers, groove, and dance, formed ER@SER DESCRIPTION.

Starting as a party band, they quickly built a diverse repertoire of electrifying beats and complex harmonies inspired by past artists and future sounds. Their self-titled debut album, released in 2017, paved the way for electronic jazz music in Adelaide and performed with artists like Kate Ceberano, Ocean Alley, and many others. In 2019, they released WAVES, a new album with production and groove at the forefront, exploring a new direction of arrangement and sonic experimentation.

ER@SER DESCRIPTION has found success over the years with their ability to fit into almost any musical situation with integrity to the genre and honouring the music. This is most evident with their collaborations with Australia's leading symphony orchestras, including SSO, QSO, WASO and ASO.

Individually, all three members have achieved great success in their own individual pursuits. Goodwin is Adelaide's premier pianist, arranger, and musical director for countless national and international acts. Strempel is an in-demand session musician and has toured Australia, the USA, and Europe. Flood has proven himself as Australia's leading drummer with a highly successful self-directed project that has seen him release four acclaimed albums and toured Europe extensively with much fanfare.

The three members have worked with five-time Grammy Award winner Michael League (USA) and Ralph Nadar (Beyoncé) and individually worked with Chief Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah (USA), James Morrison, Ross Irwin, Joe Lovano (USA), Tim Campbell, Phil Burton (Human Nature), Kevin Mitchell (Bob Evans, Jebediah), Sarah McLeod (The Superjesus), Paulini and Hugh Sheridan, proving their ability to hold their own as individual musicians and as an ensemble.



David Goodwin



Alexander Flood.
Photo by Will Hamilton-Coates



Jack Strempel

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Carlo Antonioli conductor

Carlo Antonioli is one of Australia's most dynamic young conductors, rapidly establishing himself both with the country's leading symphony orchestras and with vibrant, cutting-edge ensembles.

Carlo's recent appearances include concerts with the Sydney, Melbourne, Queensland, Adelaide, Tasmanian, Christchurch and Canberra Symphony Orchestras, Orchestra Victoria, the Australian, Sydney and Melbourne Youth Orchestras, the Australian Contemporary Opera Company, the Australian National Academy of Music, Ensemble Apex and the Australian Doctors Orchestra. Carlo has collaborated with many notable Australian and international artists, including William Barton, Roderick Williams, Julian Bliss, Katie Noonan, Li-Wei Qin and Sophie Rowell.

The 2025-2026 season sees Carlo returning to the Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide Symphony Orchestras and Orchestra Victoria.

A passionate advocate for new music, Carlo has conducted many world premieres, including for composer development programs with the MSO and AYO. He also recently served as the Associate Conductor on the AYO's 2025 International Tour, preparing the orchestra for David Robertson and conducting in the Musikverein Vienna.

Carlo previously held the positions of Cybec Assistant Conductor at the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and Assistant Conductor at the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. In addition to assisting MSO Chief Conductor Jaime Martín and WASO Principal Conductor Asher Fisch, he has assisted many prominent guest conductors in Australia including Vasily Petrenko, Sir Mark Elder, Sir Andrew Davis, Karina Canellakis and Mark Wigglesworth, as well as Vladimir Ashkenazy, Sir Donald Runnicles and Chief Conductor Simone Young at the SSO.

Carlo was one of five conductors selected for the Australian Conducting Academy in 2023-2024, training with all of the Australian state symphony orchestras and Orchestra Victoria. Carlo is a graduate of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, and is currently the Conducting Fellow at the Royal Academy of Music, London.



SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

PATRON Her Excellency The Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC

Founded in 1932 by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra has evolved into one of the world’s finest orchestras as Sydney has become one of the world’s great cities. Resident at the iconic Sydney Opera House, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra also performs in venues throughout Sydney and regional New South Wales, and international tours to Europe, Asia and the USA have earned the Orchestra worldwide recognition for artistic excellence.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra’s concerts encompass masterpieces from the classical repertoire, music by some of the finest living composers, and collaborations with guest artists from all genres, reflecting the Orchestra's versatility and diverse appeal. Its award-winning education program is central to its commitment to the future of live symphonic music, and the Orchestra promotes the work of Australian composers through performances, recordings and its commissioning program.

The Orchestra’s first chief conductor was Sir Eugene Goossens, appointed in 1947; he was followed by Nicolai Malko, Dean Dixon, Moshe Atzmon, Willem van Otterloo, Louis Frémaux, Sir Charles Mackerras, Zdeněk Mácal, Stuart Challender, Edo de Waart and Gianluigi Gelmetti. Vladimir Ashkenazy was Principal Conductor from 2009 to 2013, followed by David Robertson as Chief Conductor from 2014 to 2019. Australian-born Simone Young commenced her role as Chief Conductor in 2022, a year in which the Orchestra made its return to a renewed Sydney Opera House Concert Hall.

sydneysymphony.com

PERFORMING IN THIS CONCERT

FIRST VIOLINS

Fiona Ziegler
Assistant Concertmaster
Jennifer Booth
Sophie Cole
Sercan Danis
Alex Mitchell
Alexander Norton
Emily Qin*
Jasmine Tan*

SECOND VIOLINS

Kirsty Hilton
Principal
Marina Marsden
Principal
Rebecca Gill
Emma Hayes
Nicole Masters
Robert Smith

VIOLAS

Tobias Breider
Principal
Sandro Costantino
Carl Lee
Felicity Tsai
Amanda Verner

CELLOS

Simon Cobcroft
Associate Principal
Timothy Nankervis
Elizabeth Neville
Rebecca Herman*

DOUBLE BASSES

Dylan Holly
Steven Larson

FLUTES

Rosie Gallagher*
Guest Principal
Katlijn Sergeant
Principal Piccolo

OBOES

Callum Hogan
Acting Associate Principal
Miriam Cooney°

CLARINETS

Olli Leppäniemi
Principal
Alexander Morris
Principal Bass Clarinet

BASSOONS

Todd Gibson-Cornish
Principal
Fiona McNamara

HORNS

Samuel Jacobs
Principal
Marnie Sebire
Rachel Silver
Emily Newham°

TRUMPETS

Daniel Beasy*
Guest Principal
David Elton
Principal
Anthony Heinrichs

TROMBONES

Nick Byrne
Acting Associate Principal
Jeremy Mazurek°
Christopher Harris
Principal Bass Trombone

TIMPANI

Mark Robinson
Associate Principal Timpani/Section Percussion

PERCUSSION

Rebecca Lagos
Principal
Timothy Constable
Jess Ciampa*

HARP

Kate Moloney*
Guest Principal

SAXOPHONE

Nicholas Russoniello*
Guest Principal

GITAR

Paul Mason*

Bold Principal
* Guest Musician
° Contract Musician
* Sydney Symphony Fellow

Keep the conversation
FLOWING



“SYDNEY”
“SYMPHONY”
“ORCHESTRA”

Principal Partner



FLY BETTER

Take a break from your seat and join us in our stylish Onboard Lounge to celebrate 25 years of connecting Sydney to the world. Sip cocktails, enjoy light bites and discover an exclusive vintage on your way to your next destination.

