

ANNUAL REPORT / 2022

FINNISH NATIONAL
OPERA AND BALLET



OOPERA
BALETTI



4

The power of culture



8

Sustainability



10

Repertoire



This is an abbreviation of the Annual Report 2022, available in Finnish
oopperabaletti.fi/talo/hallinto

” *The precise and balanced performance of the Finnish National Ballet’s centenary celebrations showed high standards.*”

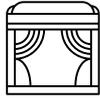
HELSINGIN SANOMAT

An overview of the Finnish National Opera and Ballet

As a national cultural institution, the primary mission of the Finnish National Opera and Ballet is to provide affecting, high quality opera and ballet experiences to diverse audiences and age groups throughout Finland. It’s both our duty and desire to develop and renew the traditions and expertise of our art form.

With creativity and expertise, we aim for the highest level of excellence in the arts. We want to inspire national pride as well as to achieve a significant international status with our opera and ballet productions as well as our other activities. We also pursue a variety of social responsibility initiatives.

The core values of the Finnish National Opera and Ballet are high artistic standards, collaboration, and responsibility. We strive for the utmost efficiency in all our operations.



The power of culture leads us towards a stronger future

2022 was a year of contradictions. It was characterised by both powerful experiences and rising concerns about global instability and the effects of the pandemic. COVID-19 restrictions were still in place during the first months of the year, and the war in Europe

and the various threats it raised cast a shadow over our operations. At the same time, we came to understand the immense effect of culture on mental resilience. As audiences returned to the Opera House, we were overwhelmed with their joy for being back at the auditorium. As a result, our foremost feeling right now is gratitude.

In 2022, the Finnish National Ballet celebrated its centenary in spectacular style. The festivities also took a unique turn due to COVID-19 restrictions. *Swan Lake* premiered without an audience, as a live broadcast event online and on television. The premiere attracted over 600,000 viewers and captured widespread international attention.

While the year started off with challenges and cancellations, the spring season ultimately ended on an unprecedented high. As the pandemic restrictions were finally lifted, we staged an impressive repertoire of six premieres at an accelerated pace over just three months.

During the autumn, there was still uncertainty in the arts sector about whether audiences would return to cultural events. Fortunately, our seats were filled, and we



“The parliament’s approval of the law on central government funding for national art institutions holds substantial importance for the future.”

sold more season tickets than ever before. We offered a vast array of captivating shows and performances – one highlight being the much-anticipated premiere of *Die Walküre*, which had been rescheduled four times due to pandemic restrictions.

The documentary *”Jumalten keinu”* (“Playing with Gods”), which followed the creation of *Die Walküre* and was aired on Yle Areena, was a touching depiction of the COVID-19 era and the way our personnel tackled constantly changing circumstances with skill and patience.

We are always on the lookout for such creative solutions, as the state of the world and its repercussions like rising costs and material scarcity also have an impact on us. We are continuously fine tuning our operations to become even more agile and sustainable.

The parliament’s approval of the law on central government funding for national art institutions, which includes an index adjustment starting from 2024, holds substantial importance for the future. This increases predictability and improves the stability of our operations in an increasingly changeable environment.

We have also addressed important themes in our repertoire. **Kaija Saariaho** and **Sofi Oksanen**’s critically acclaimed opera *Innocence* provoked discussion about complex social issues. **Akram Khan**’s choreography about women in war demonstrated art’s vital and healing connection to emotions beyond the reach of language and reason. The liberating joy of the arts in *CircOpera 2.0* was just as significant. The fusion of circus and opera inspired many first-time visitors to experience the power of our performances. What’s more, virtual encounters with our audience also created lasting impressions: our live streamed and televised broadcasts, as well as diverse video content, attracted a staggering 2.3 million views.

Gita Kadambi, General Director

To celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Finnish National Ballet, we offered

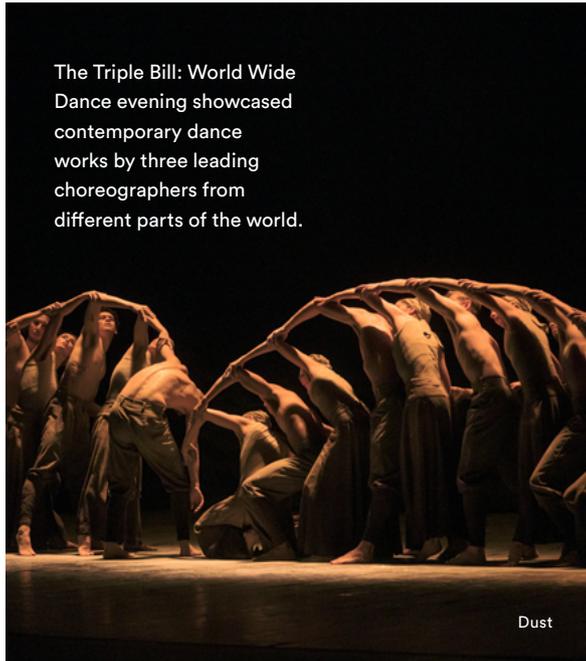
102

free ballet workshops at schools across the country.



Photo archives of the Finnish National Ballet

Founded in 1922, the Finnish National Ballet celebrated its centenary in 2022. A unique video compiled from archive footage of the Finnish National Ballet's past decades was presented at the spring gala. You can explore the history of the century-old ensemble in the article series "Twists and turns of the Finnish National Ballet": opperabaletti.fi/en/finnish-national-ballet-100-years



The Triple Bill: World Wide Dance evening showcased contemporary dance works by three leading choreographers from different parts of the world.

Dust

The Finnish National Ballet's main ensemble comprises

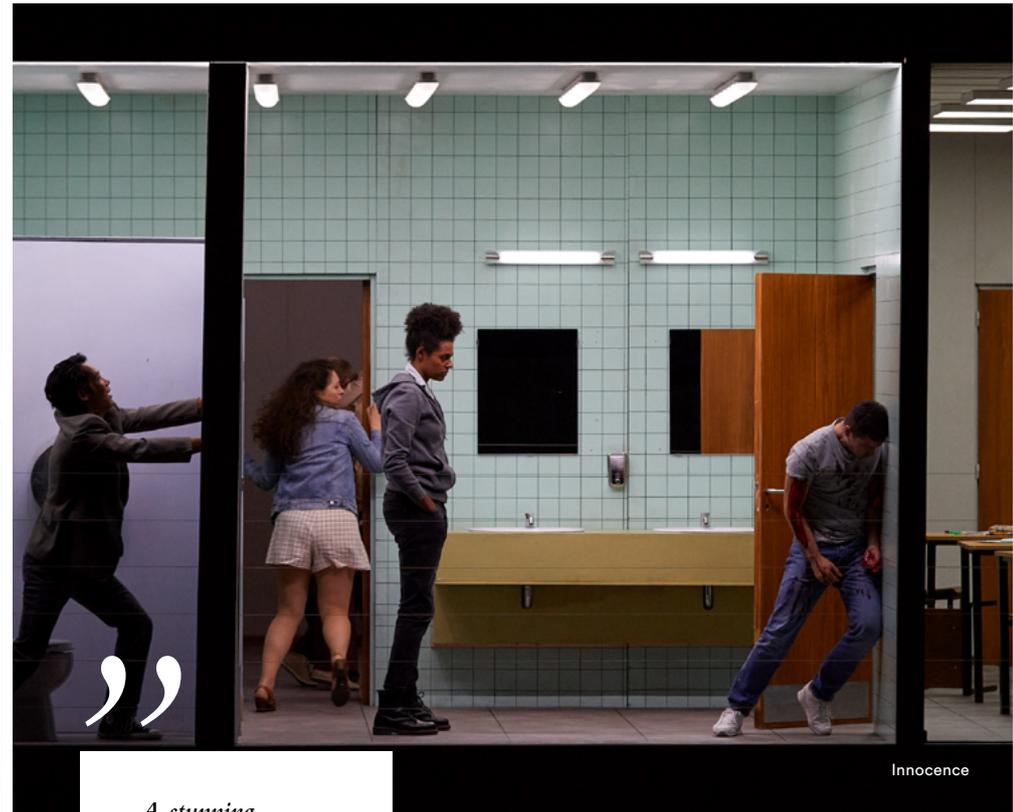
74
dancers

The dancers represent

22
nationalities

The Youth Company of the Finnish National Ballet has

14
dancers



Innocence

”

A stunning, startling, and groundbreaking performance that revolutionises the art of opera.”

Audience feedback



A pioneer of virtual experiences

We are developing our operations to ensure our resilience in the future. Our aim is to be a pioneer in digitalisation within the performing arts sector. The end of 2022 saw the conclusion of the first phase of our Opera Beyond project. Over the past four years, we have challenged the boundaries of art forms, explored the possibilities of new technologies, and built our expertise in collaboration with creative tech professionals. Notable phenomena have included projection technologies, spatial audio, VR, artificial intelligence, and the metaverse. This work has opened new doors for collaboration and enabled us to build networks in Finland and internationally. We've also learnt that innovative, immersive works also require novel production processes. At the same time, the digital tools and methods of tomorrow affect traditional stage productions, too. Opera Beyond supports our efforts to expand our audience base, enhance our ecological sustainability, and promote organisational transparency.

During the autumn season of 2022, Opera Beyond produced a new kind of visual experience and striking effects for the *CircOpera 2.0* performance, which combined circus and opera. In addition to projections that mirrored performers' movements in real-time, *CircOpera 2.0* included the first ever entirely virtual artist of the Finnish National Opera, an "avatar diva." The XR Stage tool developed in the project received the international *FEDORA Next Stage Grant* in June. The 60,000 euro prize encourages sustainable and inclusive innovations, which embrace the possibilities of digital transformation. The tool, which utilises 3D technology, gamification, and virtual technology, streamlines production planning and implementation, as the performance environment

is constructed in a virtual space early on in the artistic planning process. The XR Stage tool was piloted, for example, in the creation of the opera *Turandot*.

In September, the international Opera Beyond conference, Visioning Stages Beyond, brought together hundreds of art and technology professionals. Issues were also brought into the public debate in the Visioning Stages Beyond panel discussion at SuomiAreena.

An accessible cultural experience and an Opera House that's open to all

The virtual stage of the Finnish National Opera and Ballet, Stage24, gives everyone the opportunity to watch our performances online. In 2022, we continued our joint live streaming broadcasts with the Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle and Helsingin Sanomat.

The international OperaVision collaboration continued in March with the Next Generation project, offering free live broadcasts from 30 European opera companies. Our own production, *Total Karita*, was also shown on the platform. In the HomeOpera pilot led by the Haaga-Helia university of applied sciences, we are developing social cultural experiences for people over 60. We have experimented with virtual cultural evenings in a residential home and a digital backstage tour implemented by Haaga-Helia students.

Once the pandemic restrictions were lifted, audiences returned to the Opera House with great enthusiasm. The occupancy rate on the Main Stage during the restriction-free autumn season was an impressive 91%. We also set an all-time record in season ticket sales. We received a wealth of positive feedback, and the autumn

season's NPS (Net Promoter Score) index to measure customer satisfaction was an excellent 82.

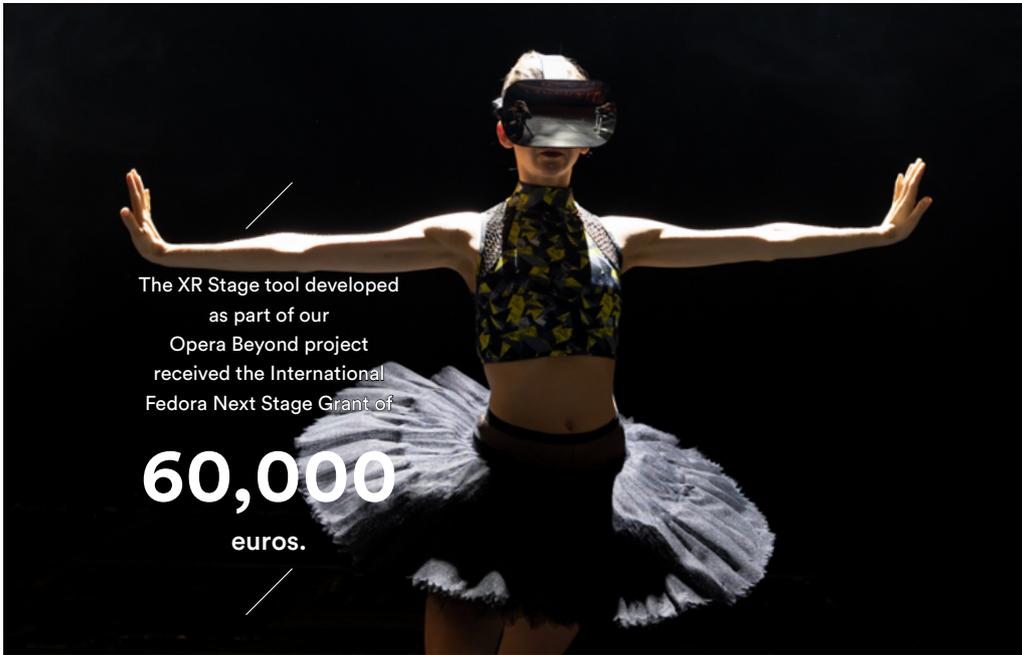
Collaboration makes us stronger

In October, the Finnish National Opera appointed a new Artistic Director from England. **Thomas de Mallet Burgess** will begin his term on 1 August 2023. The Finnish National Ballet's new Artistic Director **Javier Torres** started in his role in August 2022.

In the autumn, we launched our new Young Singers' Programme. Its purpose is to empower the professional development of singers in the early stages of their career. The programme attracted considerable international interest, and we received nearly 400 applications from around the world. Auditions were held in December, and the first singers have now been selected for the 2023–2024 season. The founding partner of the Young Singers' Programme is the Louise and Göran Ehrnrooth Foundation.

Young dancers' development and careers are supported by the Youth Company of the Finnish National Ballet, which was established in 2013. The initiative is supported by the Jane and Aatos Erkkö Foundation.

Composer **Kaija Saariaho's** 70th birthday and her music were celebrated throughout Finland in October. Saariaho's thought-provoking opera *Innocence* had its Finnish premiere at the Finnish National Opera on 21 October. Before the premiere, Kaija Saariaho, librettist **Sofi Oksanen**, and dramaturg-translator **Aleksi Barrière** discussed the creative process of *Innocence* in a unique artists' meeting at the Opera House, led by researcher **Liisamaija Hautsalo**.



The Artistic Director of the Opera from 1 August 2023, is Thomas de Mallet Burgess.



The overwhelming top choice for one thousand 8th-grade Art Testers (taidetestaajat.fi/en) in the autumn season of 2022 was the Finnish National Opera's *CircOpera 2.0*.

90%
of the participants would seek out more art experiences after seeing *CircOpera*.

CircOpera 2.0

Over **1.0** million users visited the oopperabaletti.fi website
30% more compared to 2021.

We have more than **80,000** followers on our social channels
An increase of 8% since the previous year.

We reached over **2.3** million people digitally
An increase of 94% compared to 2021.



Responsibility initiatives based on values and strategy

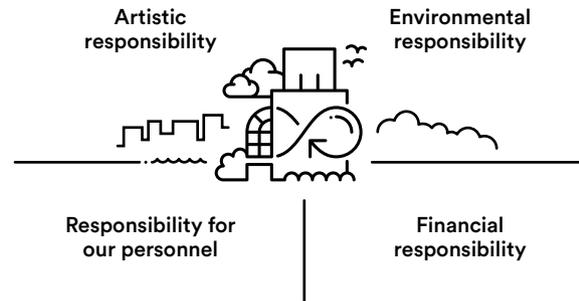
One of the four values defined in our strategy until 2025 is responsibility. We bear responsibility for our work and actions to our personnel, the environment, the audience, and our financial supporters. The concept of responsibility at the Opera House includes artistic and financial responsibility, as well as responsibility for our personnel and the environment.

We are committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In 2021, we selected five key goals on which to focus: Quality Education, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Responsible Consumption, and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. We have continued our work from the perspective of these goals.

In 2022, we added a sustainability section to our website. We also started developing our sustainability reporting.

ARTISTIC RESPONSIBILITY means being at the service of the entire Finnish society and fostering the development of the opera and ballet art forms within the country.

In order to continue serving audiences everywhere in Finland, we continued to invest in offering performances digitally. We also provided free cultural experiences to diverse age groups. In honour of the centenary of the Finnish National Ballet, we organised 102 free ballet workshops in schools around the country. The Ballet Energy for Children school tour was carried out with the support of the Jane and Aatos Erkko Foundation. Our school opera *The Source* toured 37 schools in different parts of Finland.



Our popular Opera Teatime Dance sessions are live streamed online, and any residential home or care facility in Finland can tune in for free. The live broadcasts of the Teatime Dances in the 2022–2023 season are produced in collaboration with Tradeka.

In spring 2022, we initiated a product development and service design project focused on our customer and front of house services. The preliminary project assessment was conducted in collaboration with the Threshold Association (Kynnys ry). The work continues in 2023.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY means recognising and minimising the environmental footprint of our operations, for example by embracing digitalisation, improving energy efficiency, choosing environmentally friendly materials across the board, and enhancing recycling.

The first carbon footprint calculation for the Finnish National Opera and Ballet was completed in 2021 (based on 2019 figures), and in 2022, we began working on a roadmap towards carbon neutrality.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR PERSONNEL means striving to be a good and inspiring workplace. We offer opportunities for continuous self-development and support the well-being and safety of our personnel.

In 2022 we participated in drafting the Safe at Every Stage guidelines, which aim to eliminate harassment, discrimination and inappropriate behaviour from the Finnish music industry. In *Salome*, which premiered in spring 2022, we piloted consent and intimacy training, with an intimacy choreographer as part of the opera production team.

During 2022, diversity and the colonial history of opera and ballet emerged as key topics of conversation within our organisation. While there are many perspectives to these issues, which can be challenging to address within traditional art forms, we are committed to learning from experts and fostering ongoing conversation about them both internally and in the society at large.

FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY means improving our operational efficiency, increasing our self-financing ratio, and investing responsibly.

The Ballet School of the Finnish National Opera and Ballet moved to the Opera House in early 2022. The relocation has made the institution of nearly 200 students an even more integral part of the Finnish National Opera and Ballet.



- 8 *Decent work and economic growth*
- 11 *Sustainable cities and communities*
- 12 *Responsible consumption*
- 13 *Climate action*
- 16 *Peace and justice*

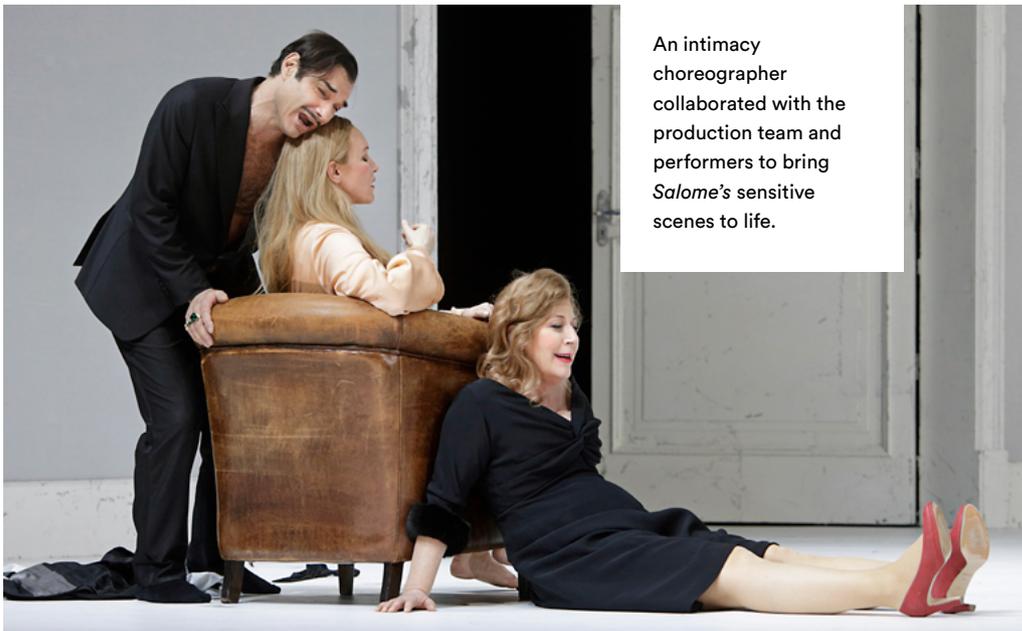
We have selected five UN Sustainable Development Goals on which to focus. We are in the process of creating metrics for our progress, and in 2022 we began to develop our dedicated sustainability report based on these.



You can learn more about our sustainability efforts at oopperabaletti.fi/en/sustainability.



World Opera Day on 25 October was celebrated by performing the Ukrainian composer Boris Lyatoshinsky's *The Golden Crown* as a joint production of seven cities: Helsinki, Lviv, London, Rome, San Francisco, Warsaw, and Washington DC.



An intimacy choreographer collaborated with the production team and performers to bring *Salome's* sensitive scenes to life.

The students of the Ballet School include:

40

vocational students in professional education aged 16–18

150

students in basic education in the arts and beginners' ballet studies aged 7–15





Hyöky



Swan Lake



Sibelius



Finnish National Ballet 100 Years: Sylvia

For information about the repertoire in 2022, see encore.opera.fi/en



Earthborn

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