

Nellie Melba Retirement Village residents visit the opera via Australia's first 'live' 3D virtual reality streaming platform

MEDIA RELEASE: With theatres shuttered and the live performance industry still reeling from the COVID-19 lockdown, a Melbourne virtual reality company is bringing a night at the opera directly to the residents of a retirement village bearing the name of Australia's most famous operatic icon. Inverse, in partnership with Ryman Healthcare and the Melba Opera Trust, will begin an aged care virtual reality (VR) opera pilot with Nellie Melba Retirement Village in Wheelers Hill this week.

The pilot aims to evaluate the therapeutic effects of VR and live opera, using an Australian-first live 3D VR streaming platform for a fully simulated front row ticket experience.

Current studies are investigating the benefits of immersive technology like VR and the pilot aims to evaluate how live opera impacts the mental wellbeing of residents living at Nellie Melba Retirement Village.

The pilot will be held on Thursday, December 17, and involve eight Nellie Melba residents, including some living with dementia.

They will experience a 60-minute live VR opera recital, starring Melba Opera Trust alumni Stacey Alleaume, Nathan Lay, Michael Petruccelli, internationally-renowned pianist Amir Farid, and hosted by the host of the ABC's 'The Opera Show', Mairi Nicolson.

Inverse founder Darren Vukasinovic said: "The mental and emotional healing power of music is widely known, and live music has an even more profound impact on one's feelings of health, happiness, and wellbeing.

"We're thrilled to be partnering with Ryman Healthcare and Melba Opera Trust in undertaking this pilot with Nellie Melba Retirement Village. We aim to support their efforts in delivering dynamic enrichment programs for their residents and look forward to treating them to an operatic experience like no other."

Melba Opera Trust CEO Amy Black, who previewed the performance in a VR headset, said: "I was experiencing a world-class opera performance from the comfort of my own home – and yet I felt as though I had front row seats.

"Being able to follow the artists around the room gave a totally fresh perspective of an operatic performance and, of course, the artistry and sound were superb. After the challenging year we have all endured, it was inspiring to feel as though I was once again in a room with live performance."

Ryman Healthcare's Operations Quality Manager Joanne Wang said they were excited to be part of the VR opera pilot.

"There's a mountain of research showing that music can have a hugely positive impact on people living with dementia. It can connect them to people and places in their past, stir emotions and memories, and just generally improve their wellbeing.

"But it's not only beneficial for people with dementia. Music is a life-enriching experience for people of all ages, and a big focus at all our villages is ensuring residents can continue to do the things they've loved doing their whole life.

"We just don't know when people will be able to return to the theatre, so this virtual reality experience allows us to bring the outside world into our village for residents to enjoy."

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