

The Sound of Music is steeped in a cherished heritage which is based on a true story and, along with romance, incorporates family and political drama.



2006, in association with Lunchbox Productions who brought *Annie* to Auckland. The latest incarnation started life in South Africa and comes to New Zealand via Singapore.

When she was cast as Maria, Bethany had already clocked up plenty of experience with lead roles in *High School Musical*, *Carousel*, *Grease* and *Sunset Boulevard*. But, as she quickly discovered, everyone had an opinion on how she should approach the role of Maria. That meant strict focus on advice from the show's first director, Jonny Bowles, and, more recently, Anton Luitingh.

"My mother has always been there for me, but she loved and respected me enough to step back and not tell me how to play the role of Maria and to let me find my own way," says Bethany.

"Everyone thought I was playing Julie Andrews because, of course, they remember her from the film and, to a certain extent, you cannot escape the comparisons that will inevitably be made. I've heard people say I look too much like Julie Andrews – I don't think I do – but the thing is there are some people who want to see it played that way.

"It's a very fine line between honouring their memories of the film or an earlier stage show and finding my own version of the character."

She was last in New Zealand playing Sandy in the rock 'n' roll musical, *Grease*. While Maria and Sandy may both be determined young women, the two shows couldn't be more different. *The Sound of Music* is steeped in a cherished heritage which is based on a true story and, along with romance, incorporates family and political drama. Bethany describes it as more dramatic than *Grease* with a stronger spiritual element and 'real world' issues which intrude into the family and love stories.

While she's been portraying Maria since the beginning of the year, Bethany will work alongside a number of new cast members in New Zealand including acclaimed English opera singer Lesley Garrett in

the role of Mother Abbess and New York-based actor Mark Rayment as widowed Captain von Trapp. There's also the addition of a lively bunch of children – 18 working in three six-strong teams – to shake things up.

She says it keeps the show fresh and the more seasoned performers on their toes. Mark joins the show having already clocked up an impressive list of performances in musicals around the world.

The romance between Maria and Captain von Trapp isn't the only one in *The Sound of Music*. Liesel von Trapp, the eldest child, and Rolf, the young Nazi soldier, are also in love but powerful outside events put paid to that.

Carmen Pretorious, who plays Liesel, says it helps that she and Rhys Hewitt Williams are great friends because their storyline involves some of the musical's most heartbreaking moments.

"But the psychology of what's going on interests me because I am intrigued by what motivates people to do what they do," says Carmen. "I think the thing I like most about *The Sound of Music* is it's a story that recognises you can be on one path but the universe has something different in store for you and you need to go with that to find your true destiny."

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THE SOUND OF MUSIC
From 3 October
LIVE AT THE CIVIC



Renowned UK soprano and personality Lesley Garrett returns to the role of Mother Abbess for the first time since performing as the wizened nun in Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber's inaugural West End season of *The Sound of Music* in 2006.

A firm but loving mother figure, Mother Abbess guides Maria through her foibles and mishaps, encouraging her to spread her wings and leave the convent to look after the von Trapp children.

"She's very loving, but she's tough – and she's powerful. She holds her convent so preciously, in the palm of her hand, and won't let anything harm it," Lesley says of the character, who she also describes as "an old friend".

"She's a wonderful character to play, and she's helped me – she's done me a lot of good. She's helped me to be strong. She's helped me in all kinds of situations. I had a wonderful time [playing her]."

Lesley's operatic career has included lead roles with the Royal Opera at Covent Garden in London, the English National Opera at the London Coliseum, the Glyndebourne Festival Opera, the Welsh National Opera and Opera North. A hugely versatile performer, her career has also traversed a popular route: she's hosted her own television and radio shows and released 14 solo albums, including her most recent, *A North Country Lass*.

A much-loved personality in the UK, Lesley has a large and loyal following, including one fan club member who's travelling to New Zealand just to see her perform.

"He's having a holiday so he can come and see my show, which I think is so sweet of him. We have great fans, we do."

Though she's been invited to tour with *The Sound of Music* since it finished on the West End, the New Zealand season will be the first time Lesley has chosen to travel abroad with it, and in fact the first production in fact that she's taken on outside of the UK in quite some time.

"Now that both of my children have gone to university, I can start travelling again. New Zealand's the first place I'll be coming to – I'm very excited. When they said [the show] was coming to New Zealand I couldn't resist."