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Opera's ringing endorsement despite blow-out

Miriam Cosic, Arts editor
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TRAVELLERS at Adelaide airport applauded soprano Lisa Gasteen yesterday afternoon as she hobbled on crutches to catch Flight 662 to her home town of Brisbane.

Less than 12 hours before, an ecstatic audience at Festival Theatre gave her a standing ovation at the end of the first all-Australian production of Richard Wagner's four-opera cycle, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

On Tuesday afternoon, Gasteen sprained her ankle in a fall while walking in the park. The show went on and she gave a performance of such force and artistry that her limp seemed a part of her character. She is now confirmed as one of the greatest Brunnhildes of her generation.

The leaping flames and the ceiling-high water curtain worked perfectly for the grand cycle finale. But after the State Opera of South Australia's multi-million dollar cost blow-out, the recruitment of technical director Noel Staunton in February to pull the production together and health concerns about tenor Timothy Mussard, director Elke Neidhardt's relief and joy were almost palpable as she took her curtain call.

SOSA's director, Stephen Phillips, was exultant yesterday. He said the production's final bill of \$15.3 million could still be recouped: both the Hong Kong Festival and Los Angeles Opera had shown interest in buying it. "All this is in the afterglow of last night," he said. "But I hope it will have an afterlife and I honestly hope we will see it again in Adelaide."

SOSA's management and board will examine the final figures in the new year to see if the production could be revived in a few years.

"We will talk to the Government and see if it is in everybody's interests to restage the cycle," Mr Phillips said.

Premier Mike Rann is talking up the \$15 million the production is expected to bring directly to the state.

"If we had cancelled the festival, it would have cost more and we wouldn't have had anything to show for it," he said, pointing out that his predecessors had commissioned the cycle.

Adelaide mayor Michael Harbison said that, despite the blow-out, the Ring cycle would have a multiplier effect on the state's economy. "Wagnerites tended to be movers and shakers from around the world," he said.

On a flight back to Sydney yesterday, passengers included NSW Governor Marie Bashir, artist Jeffrey Smart and opera director Moffatt Oxenbould. Despite the well-known faces at the departure gates, when a call came for passenger Gasteen, a ripple went through the crowd.

As she stomped towards the gate, people began to clap and she boarded with applause ringing in her ears. She will reappear on stage as Brunnhilde on Saturday.

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