

By the grace of Tim and Jeff



Steve Kilbey says of Jeff Buckley, below, 'he had music flowing through his veins'. Below left, Tim Buckley

RENEE NOWYTARGETER

The Church's Steve Kilbey joins a tribute to two generations of Buckley talent

IAIN SHEDDEN

Steve Kilbey regrets that he never got to see Jeff Buckley perform. "I always thought 'he'll be around'," says the Church's long-serving singer and songwriter. "I'll see him next time."

Tragedy prevented that from happening. In May 1997, Buckley, one of the most revered songwriters and performers to emerge from the US in the 1990s, drowned after going for a river swim in Memphis, just as his band was arriving in the city to record with him. He was 30.

Buckley's death brought to a shocking end a rare talent, described by Bob Dylan as "one of the great talents of the decade". He left behind only one completed studio album, 1994's *Grace*, a recording that illustrates majestically what Kilbey describes as the singer's "pure genius".

"He'd just open his mouth and this beautiful music would pour out," Kilbey says. "He had music flowing through his veins."

Kilbey's passion for Buckley's music, what little of it he left behind, is why he is one of the featured artists in *State of Grace*, a tribute to Buckley and his father, singer-songwriter Tim Buckley, which begins a national tour in Australia on September 23.

Buckley Sr, who between 1966 and 1974 released nine albums, including the much-lauded *Happy Sad* (1969) and *Greetings From LA* (1972), also met a tragic end, when he died of a drug overdose at 28 in 1975.

He split from the family soon

after his son was born and had little contact thereafter.

Musical director of this intertwining story of their careers is renowned American guitarist and songwriter Gary Lucas, who worked with the younger Buckley in New York at the start of his career and co-wrote two of the songs on *Grace*, the title track and the opening song, *Mojo Pin*.

State of Grace features Kilbey alongside Canada's Martha Wainwright, American troubadour Willy Mason, Ireland's Camille O'Sullivan, Denmark's Casper Clausen and Somali-Canadian singer-songwriter Cold Specks.

These performers will be backed by Lucas's band Gods and Monsters. Veteran Lucas has worked with a wide variety of artists, from Bryan Ferry to Iggy Pop and was Captain Beefheart's guitarist for five years. He met Jeff Buckley in New York after they performed together in a tribute to Tim Buckley at Brooklyn's St Ann's Church. A friendship developed and Buckley ended up playing guitar in Gods and Monsters as well as writing material with Lucas.

"When I met him I was overwhelmed by his talent," says Lucas. "I was just surprised to hear first off that Tim had a son."

"When I was leaving he approached me. I knew right away it was Jeff. He said he was a big fan and wanted to work with me. He came around to my apartment and we worked on a song."

On the surface there are few



'When Jeff emerged with the *Grace* album, he put some distance between himself and his father. He had some issues and anger because Tim more or less abandoned him'

GARY LUCAS
MUSICAL DIRECTOR,
STATE OF GRACE

identifiable traits in the Buckleys' music that tie them together, other than a strong will to push the boundaries of convention.

The elder Buckley drew on jazz, folk and soul music to create a kind of avant-garde hybrid that was very much of its time.

In Jeff Buckley's *Grace* and the posthumous releases of incomplete recordings such as *Sketches for My Sweetheart the Drunk* (1998) one can trace blues, punk rock, Led Zeppelin and the more delicate palate of Dylan and Leonard Cohen, whose *Hallelujah* is one of the standout tracks on *Grace*.

"The common thread is a spiritual one," Lucas says. "*State of Grace* is very apt. Tim was operating in a zone beyond commercial art. He was trying to embody the joy and the pain."

After Jeff Buckley found success with his debut album he was often reluctant to talk about his relationship, negligible though it was, with his father.

"When he emerged with the



down and listened to it I would start to understand it."

With the show only weeks away, the Church singer, whose band is enjoying a renaissance locally and overseas, may be a little more up to speed with the Buckleys' legacies.

Each of the *State of Grace* performers will sing selections from each of the Buckley catalogues, while the ensemble will come together for a few songs as a finale.

Nor does Kilbey see much of himself in either of the songwriters. "Nothing at all, actually," he says. "With songwriters you have these two extremes where you have not a lot of talent but loads of intelligence. Say someone like Lou Reed. He didn't have a great voice but with his intelligence, his savvy and his manipulation of what he had he built up a huge body of work. Jeff is the opposite. He had great talent."

Kilbey is performing the song *Forget Me* by Jeff Buckley in the show, a song that didn't make it on to *Grace* but appeared later on the deluxe edition. He admits that the talent of both singers makes this show something of a challenge for him. "I think this is going to really push me vocally," he says. "I'm not sure if I'm technically a good enough singer. I'm more of a personal singer. What I don't have in technique I can make up for in other ways. These guys... they are real singers and you really have to be able to do that. I really think this is the hardest gig I've ever taken on. I just hope I can pull it off."

The joining of the two men's music does a service to those admirers of both men's work. Kilbey, however, is not as keen on the older man's material as he is on the music of Jeff. "I never owned any of his records," Kilbey says. "People at school had them. I find him very complex, hard to grasp. The songs wander around. I've never really understood the jazzy folkie thing. I think maybe if I sat

State of Grace begins in Melbourne on September 23 followed by Brisbane on September 25 and 26, Sydney September 27, Melbourne September 29 and Canberra September 30.

Opera's selling up, but it's not going for a song

Opera Australia is selling its central Melbourne headquarters and rehearsal studio as the company seeks to realise an asset potentially worth more than \$12 million.

The company is planning to sell its Melbourne Opera Centre at City Road, Southbank, in line with a neighbouring property that is also for sale. It's estimated the two properties combined could realise \$25m.

OA chief executive Craig Hassall says the company is not quitting Melbourne but is hoping to expand to bigger premises in the city.

"The real impetus is that it's a very hot time in Southbank at the moment," he says.

"There is a lot of interest in developing sites in the area and we were inspired by that market activity."

Hassall says proceeds from the sale will not go into general operating revenue but will be reinvested as a capital asset.

OA also has a Sydney Opera Centre in Surry Hills, and while Hassall says there are no plans to sell that site, the company may choose to move in future.

OA's 2013-14 annual report shows the company owns land and buildings worth \$19.7m.

The company hopes to move to bigger premises in Melbourne, in keeping with its ambition to make the city the home of large-scale opera.

OA presents opera at the State Theatre at Arts Centre Melbourne — a much bigger stage than that at the Sydney Opera House — and in recent seasons has staged *Don Giovanni*



JEFF BUSBY

Opera at the Arts Centre

and Wagner's *Ring* cycle there. The company will remount Neil Armfield's production of the *Ring* next year.

A leaseback option means OA can continue to use the Southbank studio for up to three years, and Hassall says it will look for bigger premises where it can have rehearsals with full orchestra. It is possible the company could share a studio with another company such as the Australian Ballet or Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

OA leases its Melbourne studio to other companies, and among recent shows to rehearse there was Cameron

Mackintosh's production of *Les Misérables*. Hassall says OA makes its studio available to some local companies at discounted rates, as a way of supporting the small-to-medium arts sector, and wants to continue that arrangement.

MATTHEW WESTWOOD

Requiem from a heavyweight

MUSIC

Verdi's Requiem State Opera of South Australia. State Opera Chorus, Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. Conductor: Timothy Sexton. Adelaide Festival Theatre, August 26.

GRAHAM STRAHLE

A unique twist on Verdi's Requiem seems to have helped resolve a 140-year-old debate over this hybrid masterpiece. It's opera to the core. So strong are its dramatic contrasts and sheer volume of sound that his Latin Mass for the Dead has persistently been likened to the same composer's operas.

In a clever if rather cheeky move, the State Opera of South Australia has acknowledged this by borrowing the same sets for its performances of the Requiem as it is using in its current production of Gounod's *Faust*.

And the wonderful irony is that these gorgeous gothic-inspired outdoor designs (by Charles Edwards) accompany a scene in that opera in which Mephistopheles dances grotesquely in front of an exploding crucifix.

What that says about the religious sceptic Verdi and the meaning of his Requiem certainly had one pondering. But the strength of this performance was that here was a work whose outpouring of emotion was as theatrically forceful as one might ever encounter.

Four trumpeters were perched in windows either side of the singers, who were seated

on stage, and next to them was the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra's percussionist, Steven Peterka, who delivered staggering bass drum strikes in the Dies Irae.

Conductor Timothy Sexton made much of the music's colossal swings of energy from hushed sotto voce to triple forte, but one could admire just as equally his generous, expansive sense of line. He gave amplitude to the State Opera Chorus to veritably sing their hearts out. Their tone throughout was full, strong and secure.

It takes gusty soloists to rise above what is arguably one of the 19th century's loudest scores. The confidence and clarity of soprano Teresa La Rocca made her shine throughout, while alto Elizabeth Campbell's artistry and cohesive contribution as an ensemble singer gave a particular depth.

The two male soloists, Diego Torre and Douglas McNicol, could not have been more different vocally, but like characters in an opera their contrast here proved an asset. Torre projecting strongly with his fine, high spinto tenor and McNicol providing warmth and authority as bass.

At times the combined vocal forces sounded like a festival of vibrato, which for Verdi only adds to the strength of his music. But a clean-sounding Adelaide Symphony Orchestra balanced out the sound effectively and helped make for an enjoyable performance.

Concert repeats tonight at 7.30pm. Tickets: \$35-\$100. Bookings: 131 246.

Win a taste of the Hot 50

Celebrate The Australian's Hot 50 restaurants with a chance to win one of seven \$500 vouchers to the nation's hottest eateries.



Monster, Canberra



Fino at Seppeltfield, Barossa Valley



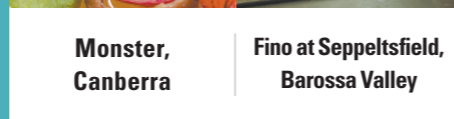
Attica, Melbourne



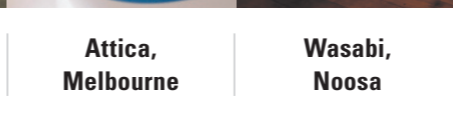
Wasabi, Noosa



Franklin, Hobart



Print Hall, Perth



The Bridge Room, Sydney

HOT
50
RESTAURANTS
2015

MEMBERS CAN ENTER FOR A CHANCE TO WIN AT THEAUSTRALIANPLUS.COM.AU

THE AUSTRALIAN *plus* | OPENS DOORS