

Citation for Ms Deborah Joy Cheetham AO BMusEd, AMusA
Monday 9 April, 2018 at 3:00pm

Officiator: Mr Jim McDowell

Award recipient: Ms Deborah Cheetham AO BMusEd, AMusA

Award being conferred: Honorary Doctor of the University (DUniv)

Citation delivered by: Professor Peter Buckskin, EdD, PSM, FACE Dean: Aboriginal Engagement & Strategic Projects

Chancellor, the University of South Australia awards the Honorary Degree of Doctor of the University to a person of eminence who has made a distinguished contribution to public service, or a field of academic endeavour or artistic pursuit. It is my pleasure to present Ms Deborah Joy Cheetham AO for the honorary degree of Doctor of the University, in recognition of her distinguished service to the community.

Deborah Cheetham is a world-renowned Indigenous Australian soprano, actor, composer, playwright, producer, director, academic and educator. A Yorta Yorta woman, she is a member of the Stolen Generations who was removed from her mother as a baby and brought up in a non-Aboriginal family in southern Sydney.

Ms Cheetham graduated from the NSW Conservatorium of Music and studied in New York under the guidance of vocal coaches and répétiteurs from the Metropolitan Opera and Julliard School of Music.

Since her international debut in 1997, Ms Cheetham has forged a successful international career, writing and composing works such as *White Baptist Abba Fan* and *Pecan Summer*, the first opera written by an Indigenous Australian and involving an Indigenous cast.

Just recently the University of South Australia partnered with Ms Cheetham and the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra to develop a new piece of processional music that was premiered this afternoon at this ceremony and will be played at all graduation ceremonies from now on.

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Ms Cheetham is Associate Dean (Indigenous) in the Faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts and the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne. She served as the Head of the Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development at the University of Melbourne from 2011-2014, working to provide Indigenous artists with pathways to a future in the visual and performing arts. She spent 20 years working as a high school teacher early in her career and now visits schools to share with students about her life and experiences.

In April 2007, Ms Cheetham was awarded a prestigious two-year Fellowship from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board of the Australia Council for the Arts, which allowed her to create her opera, *Pecan Summer*. She went on to establish the Short Black Opera Company, a national non-profit organisation devoted to the development of Indigenous opera singers. Ms Cheetham is passionate about improving access to careers in the arts for young Indigenous Australians and has mentored artists such as Wiradjuri soprano Shauntai Batzke.

Ms Cheetham's contribution to the arts and her mentorship of Indigenous artists has been widely recognised. In 2010, she was a finalist for the Australian of the Year in Victoria. In the 2014 Queen's Birthday Honours List, she was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO), for "distinguished service to the performing arts as an opera singer, composer and artistic director, to the development of Indigenous artists, and to innovation in performance". In 2013, she received the Rotary Vocational Service Award and in 2015, she joined the Honour Roll of Victorian Women.

Chancellor: On behalf of the University of South Australia, I am pleased to present Ms Deborah Joy Cheetham AO for the honorary degree of Doctor of the University, in recognition of her distinguished service to the community.