

# Fair lady Mary set for musical debut

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SHE will be Australia's first saint within a month, and a singing nun even sooner. Clearly, there's something about Mary.

Set to be canonised in Rome on October 17, Mary MacKillop is also about to star in a musical written and scored by Xavier Brouwer, a Xavier College old boy and the son of the state Ombudsman, George Brouwer.

The semi-professional production of *MacKillop*, being bankrolled by a "six-figure" contribution from Catholic Super superannuation fund, will be staged in Melbourne for three shows at the 1000-seat Besen Centre in Burwood from October 23 after eight Sydney shows.

"It's been a bit of a long, hard slog getting this up, because we don't really have much of an industry for dramatic musicals here," said Brouwer, who trained at the Frankfurt conservatorium in the 1990s before deciding computing might offer better career opportunities.

"It started about seven years ago when I was reading a biography on Mary MacKillop. I had never imagined she might be suitable for a musical, but the thought occurred to me that her life was quite dramatic, exciting and really quite epic, and you

could take an audience on that emotional journey through music."

Brouwer said his work was "halfway between an opera and a musical, which has made it a little hard to market". He claimed the score had elements of Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, Scottish and Australian folk songs and indigenous music, but Mary's words are largely her own. "Many of the lyrics she sings are straight quotes from her letters," he said. "She'd probably be a little bit embarrassed that they're being made so public."

Technically, this is not the world premiere of the work — a bare-bones version featuring a backing track, four kids and four adults was performed before World Youth Day in Melbourne in 2008. Next month's performances are being staged with a 30-piece orchestra, an 80-voice choir and opera singer Joanna Cole in the lead.

Brouwer hopes the work will one day be performed by a fully professional outfit, and challenged Australian opera and theatre companies to take a risk. "Why not put this on?" he said. "It's the same scale . . . [but] an original Australian story in a fresh, modern production."

You never know. Miracles do happen, apparently.