

# The Australian

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## It's soul music as Mary's life hits the stage

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Composer Xavier Brouwer with choir members Liam Attard, Mairead McCaughan, Elen Attard, and Meg Attard in North Sydney. Picture: Makin Brianne.

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**THEY'RE big shoes to fill, but that doesn't mean the creators of a new musical based on the life of Mary Mackillop are looking for a star.**

"We actually don't need a big name (for the title role) because Mary Mackillop herself is very well known," composer Xavier Brouwer said yesterday. "We're just looking for someone who has talent and is able to sing the role."

The show, *Mackillop*, will be staged in Sydney and Melbourne in October to coincide with the canonisation of Australia's first saint. The story follows the key events in her life, and everything has been fact-checked by the Mackillop-founded Sisters of St Joseph, as well as Jesuit scholars and historians.

"Mary Mackillop was an extremely positive role model, and she wasn't a nun who stayed in a convent all day," Brouwer said.

"She went out there and set up schools and orphanages and helped women in refuges. It struck me that these are the sorts of role models that we need to put out there for young kids."

Starting in Sydney this week, auditions are being held for the cast and orchestra. There are about 80 parts to fill, some of which require an ability to perform with Scottish, Irish and Cockney accents. The 10 major roles include three priests, two bishops and a pope. But none is more demanding than that of Mackillop herself.

Brouwer said the successful candidate would be aged between 18 and 40 and sing with a mid-range, mezzosoprano voice.

"Because she appears in almost every scene, we're after someone who has a strong voice and who can have the stamina to sing for a long period of time," he said.

The musical had its premiere in Adelaide last year in a one-off performance with a cast of students from Mary MacKillop College. The script and music have both been enhanced for this year's season, staged by Catholic arts organisation Artes Christi.

"The tone is like *Les Miserables*," Brouwer said. "It's like a dramatic musical set in old-fashioned times. It's got touches of Gilbert and Sullivan, touches of modern musicals."