

NEWSFRONT |

WITH IHOS Opera's production of the *Barbarians* being one of the centre pieces of MONA-FOMA 2012, both theatre reviewer Robert Jarman and music reviewer Peter Donnelly saw it as too important an event to miss. This is what they thought of the premiere performance. It is being repeated at the City Hall until Sunday.

Heading in a bold new direction



FIRST NIGHT
Robert Jarman

TASMANIA'S IHOS Opera gained an international reputation in the 1990s with daring large-scale works, but for the past seven or so years its output has withered for want of adequate resources.

This new work, a visionary commission by MONA FOMA, gets the high-value production it needs and deserves.

The opera is inspired by Cavafy's enigmatic *Waiting for the Barbarians*, a poem that ambiguously pits civilisation against barbarism.

As conceived by composer/director Constantine Koukias, the opera embraces the contradictions of both the poem and the zeitgeist.

Koukias has devised a sophisticated theatrical overlay to the poem, shaped out of his exquisite aesthetic, which complements Cavafy's own.

He exploits the physical and technical powers of the theatre. Bold abstract poetic visuals are couched in lush theatrical language.

It is a fascinating exposition of pure formalism, and the outward expression of complex inner meaning.

For Koukias and Ihos, this enthralling production signals a new direction, a new life. A finer, focused eye for detail. A leaner, sharper enterprise. A subtler, more mature vision. A company we can (again) get excited about.

Rich musical tapestry of life in art mix



MUSIC
Peter Donnelly

SUCH is the scope of this work, that I will address my review mainly to the musical aspects. From the perspective of its musical content, this production provides a rich tapestry of ideas from the ever-inventive and original mind of composer Con Koukias. The overall concept of Koukias's stage works certainly fulfils Wagner's idea of combining all the arts in a synthesis representing the complete work of art.

Waiting for the Barbarians, by Greek poet Constantine Cavafy, is a poem from 1904 which, with great irony, explores ideas of society, the state, and the taking of responsibility for solving our problems.

Seven musicians, under the direction of Donald Bate, performed the live score, which emerged seamlessly combined with pre-recorded tracks. The vocal elements revolved around the figures of the Poet, bass-baritone Nicholas Dinopoulos, and his younger self, boy alto Ayrton Rose. The other principals are soprano Grace Ovens and Chorus Leader Anastasia Houndalas. The central figure of the Man, Christos Linou, as well as a Greek Chorus, did not sing.

The text is performed in Modern Greek with pre-recorded English translation.

This was a challenging, always involving, and frequently moving, hour-long piece of musical theatre.