

Edited by
DEBORAH JONES

PERFORMANCE

DAYS AND NIGHTS WITH CHRIST

By Constantine Koukias. IHOS Opera. Director and design: Constantine Koukias. Production director: Werner Ihlenfeld. Princes Wharf No 1 Shed, Hobart.

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IHOS calls itself an opera company. It also calls itself an "experimental music theatre troupe", which is somewhat closer to the point. The more accurate description of what it does, however, might be performance art. Everything IHOS delivers gives primacy to the visual experience.

In the audacious harnessing of vast spaces, the repetition of motifs such as figures perceived dimly in the distance, the deliberate placing and movement of actors, the painterly use of light and, most particularly, in Constantine Koukias's sound-sculptures (this is music you can physically feel), the key imperative is image-making.

The performance area for *Days and Nights with Christ* is entered via an impressive series of "large kinetic sculptures" by Heather B. Swann; at one end of the space is a mountain of salt while at the other is a wall made from blocks of ice. This setting is almost a show in itself.

Such an approach saves Koukias from being too tied to specific meaning while accessing powerful resonances. *Days and Nights with Christ*, for instance, is a response to schizophrenia, but is not "about" schizophrenia in any conventional sense. It is obviously an intensely personal work but does not strip the author or the subject bare in an embarrassing confessional.

The audience is left room for its own reflections — and the audience does have to work here, just as it must with a painting that refuses to reveal its secrets easily.

Days and Nights is an emotionally charged work anchored by a harrowing and beautiful performance from dancer and choreographer Christos Linou as The Man. It's a performance that blurs the boundaries between life and art when he strips naked and is bathed in a wall of water — this in an unheated warehouse in Hobart in the middle of winter.

Days and Nights With Christ was IHOS's first work, created in 1990, and is, I think, its best. When one places *Days and Nights* alongside the rest of the company's work, a pattern emerges. Koukias's strong aesthetic is quick to implant itself into the memory, and he runs the risk of appearing to quote from himself too closely and too often. A house style too strictly adhered to can become repetition.

By placing his image-making in a theatrical context, Koukias harnesses the power of the live performer relating to an audience in space and time; he fills that space with sound so textured you can almost touch it; he creates almost impossibly vivid stage pictures.

The experience is a keen and rewarding one, and Koukias has abundant artistic gifts. Now we want to see what he will do next, not what he will do again.