

## DANCE REVIEW

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### **MAUI - ONE MAN AGAINST THE GODS**

Westpac St James Theatre,  
Wellington, to June 5  
Reviewed by Ann Hunt

At the end of this spectacular show, the audience was on its feet cheering. The Maui legends are as familiar to New Zealanders as Marmite on toast. To see them brought so successfully to life felt like a cultural homecoming of which all concerned should be proud.

It took producer and director Tanemahuta Gray five years and \$1 million of mostly overseas backing to bring it to fruition. After the ecstatic reception on opening night, many must wish they hadn't been so slow in fronting up with the cash, because this show is going to tour and tour and tour.

It is big, beautiful and crammed with talent. Gray's sister, Merenia, devised the choreography, Gareth Farr composed the wonderfully varied score, with additional music by Ross Harris and Witi Ihimaera.

The spare, evocative set design

is by Tolis Papazoglou, Gillie Coxill did the costumes and Martyn Roberts the striking lighting. Climbing director James Ogilvie's aerial sequences are pivotal to the show's success.

An intriguing mix of kapa haka, contemporary dance, aerial work and circus skills, the show is entirely in Maori.

The first half felt a trifle over-long, but Gray's direction kept it rattling along and the special effects were so spectacular that you didn't care anyway.

The show's end, however, is anti-climactic and needs work.

Many of the set pieces, including the best two (the cavern of fire and the human waka ploughing through mist-strewn waves) were old and simple theatrical devices. But in this case, considerably more money than usual had been thrown at them and they were magical.

But if the special effects were the icing on the cake, the flavour came from the integrity of the performances.

In Tamati Te Nohotu, Gray has

a perfect Maui. Te Nohotu combines physical beauty, engaging charm and athletic physicality to portray Maui's journey from ingenuity to vaulting ambition.

As Taranga, Maui's mother, Mere Boynton fills the stage with her beautiful voice and strong presence.

Toni Huata is a powerful and compelling Hine-Nui-Te-Po, and Toa Waka shines as Tama-Nui-Te-Ra.

Maui's four brothers are amusingly played by Te Puoho Katene, Jarod Rawiri, Jacob Tamaiparea and Kereama Te Ua. Their feeling of whanau is well conveyed and their meeting with Maui almost stopped the show.

The principals are strongly supported by the entire cast and the aerialists are exemplary. Darting out over the audience, wreathed in shimmering silk, they conjure wraiths of legend and nightmare. In the cavern of fire, when the flames are extinguished, they plummet to the ground like floating ash - an indelible image.

As they say, Maui, you're a legend.