

From myth to theatrical legend

REVIEW

WHAT: Maui — One Man Against the Gods, Te Ao Marama Tapui Company

WHERE: Westpac St James Theatre, May 25 to June 5

REVIEWED BY: Jenny Stevenson

TANEMAHUTA GRAY and his collaborators have succeeded in creating a minor, theatrical miracle in this multi-disciplined depiction of the legend of the celebrated demigod Maui — the man who took on the gods.

Marshalling the ferocious energy of kapa haka, Gray demanded and received a visceral response from an audience who were thoroughly enchanted by the theatre of images that he conjured up, with every trick in the book, and then some.

Building on the solid traditions of Maori theatre of Aotearoa, Gray, like the hero of this work, has dared to move it forward to a new level — creating the stuff of legend with flying, music, singing, dance and comedy, yet always maintaining the integrity of tradition. The result of four years' labour, the work has been as epic in its creation as the mythology that it depicts and draws on the skills of many, including Andre Anderson the creative producer and Geoff Pinfield the assistant director

In the title role, Tamati Te



Giving it heaps: Tamati Te Nohotu gives the 'performance of a lifetime' as the demigod Maui.

Picture: MAARTEN HOLL

Nohotu gave the performance of a lifetime — never flagging or faltering till in the rousing haka in defiance of Hine, the goddess of death, he appeared transformed, as though possessed. As his mother, Taranga, Mere Boynton created a welling grief at her inability to stop the folly of her wayward

son, using her fine voice to tug at the emotions.

Toni Huata as Hine-Nui-Te-Po was a powerful and at times chilling presence and Toa Waka as Tama-Nui-Te-Ra kept his haughty demeanour till unceremoniously stripped of his power by the irascible Maui.

Te Puoho Katene, Jarod Rawiri, Jacob Tamaiparea and Kereama Te Ua play Maui's brothers with a great deal of humour, but also with a disciplined and highly skilled command of the martial arts of patu and taiaha and an energy that transmits to the back of the theatre and beyond.

Six aerialists, supported by four climbers under the direction of Jamie Ogilvie and an ensemble of eight dancers, depicted a vast array of characters, creatures and beings that inhabit the land, the sky, the underworld, the cavern of fire, the forest and the sea. Gray's sister, choreographer, Merenia Gray, has skilfully woven the elemental forces into a broad-based contemporary dance vocabulary of multi-levelled, sculptural shapes and continuous momentum.

Gareth Farr's superb music was an event in itself but never threatened to overwhelm the production. Tolis Papazoglou has created a design that spans the worlds with a sleight-of-hand that makes it look deceptively easy — in a bold partnership with lighting designer Martyn Roberts and costume designer Gillie Coxill.

There's very little doubt that this powerful production will go on to achieve the world exposure it is aiming for. It is only performing in Wellington before embarking on its travels.