

## Iolanta | His Majesty's Theatre | ★★ ★ ½

WA Opera's world premiere production of Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta* shows this one act opera through the eyes of the blind heroine. In collaboration with [DADAA](#) and WA's blind and vision impaired community, the libretto has been re-written to incorporate lived experience of a person who cannot see light.

In the titular role of Iolanta, Elena Perroni sings Tchaikovsky's writing, accompanied by performer Grace King in the role of Queen Iolanta; a role that was written into this adaptation. Grace enters the stage where she stands in front of a wooden bench, introducing herself to the audience as Queen Iolanta and talking the audience through her surroundings. King describes the outfit she is wearing, specifying the details of her costume and her garden where the majority of the work is set. King's narration gives the audience insight into her world. Throughout the work, King re-enters the stage to provide her commentary of lived experience as the story unfolds.



The opera opens with the curtain up, while eleven mannequins gowned in Tyler Hills costume designs stand on the bare raked stage. The costumes reflect multiple layers of historical context from the original telling of the story from the 1400s, to Tchaikovsky's 1800s adaptation and the early 1900s architecture of His Majesty's theatre. I found it unusual to start the work with the character costumes on display, but soon realised this would be the last time we got to see them as the opera was performed in darkness.

In creating the world within Iolanta's mind, the women's chorus lined the front row of the lower balcony, producing an immersive and surround sound experience accompanied by different scents that were released into the theatre throughout the performance. Led by Chris Van Tuinen, the orchestra provided a robust, yet delicate accompaniment to the younger voices. Perroni's inward and sensitive performance was very grounded and felt informed by her personal connection to understanding the world without sight. Performing the role of Count Vaudemont, Matthew Reardon shone as he stepped in to sing the role at short notice. Fiona Campbell, Brigitte Heuser and Chelsea Burns gave superb ensemble performances, bringing so much musical colour and fun to the performance.

Staged completely in shadow and embodying the ever-changing role that art plays in society, Iscel's libretto aims to change negative attitudes and a narrative of pity which she has experienced throughout her life as a blind person. King's narration strays away from Tchaikovsky's original libretto, to follow a story that better represents real life. It highlighted how Iolanta was held captive; not by her blindness, but by the ignorance and assumptions of those around her. Instead of regaining her sight and falling in love as the fairy-tale goes, Iscel's Iolanta remains blind. Queen Iolanta highlights that she does not want her sight restored, as she adores the beauty she sees in her mind's eye. This production puts a twist on the ending in that she does live happily ever after with her true love, but she does it whilst remaining blind.

Director Katt Osborne and disability advocate Zel Iscel drive this nuanced, perspective shifting work with an element of humanity and inclusiveness which I hope to see incorporated in the opera platform in the future.

**Iolanta runs until April 9 at His Majesty's Theatre. For more information, head to [waopera.asn.au](http://waopera.asn.au)**

*Claira Prider, image: Clinton Bradbury*

[Review | WA Opera shift perspective in reimagined 'Iolanta' - OUTInPerth | LGBTQIA+ News and Culture | OUTInPerth | LGBTQIA+ News and Culture](#)