**Somtow transcendent**

*L’The Silent Prince* is a stunning opera – and for our times

JONATHAN RICHMOND SPECIAL TO THE NATION

n Somtow Sucharitkul’s opera *The Silent Prince*, which had its Bangkok premiere at the Thailand Cultural Centre on December 5 in honour of His Majesty the King, Jak Cholvijarn – not just Prince Temiya, the character he played – meditated for almost the entire length of the production. Finally, in the last astonishing five minutes, the Prince revealed himself as a bodhisattva, a man about to become a god.

As in Mozart’s opera, where brief silence between notes can speak as eloquently as the music, Jak’s endurance made for a profound quietude that at times seemed to be a wildflower’s insistent distractions and hindrances. Then came a moment of unexpected clarity, and at precisely the right time, so beautifully timed, that the audience could leap to the astonished understanding of the young buddha’s rejection of evil. It was an act of pure sacrificial love, an act of a god’s sacrifice.

Jak is a true male soprano, his sound pure, without question the voice of an angel. His rejection of evil was no normal human. His rejection of evil was so sublime and powerful that when, in the final act, he was revealed (as Jak Cholvijarn’s performance as Prince Temiya) to be a bodhisattva, his music brought a depth and celestial presence that I had never before heard in the history of live opera. His music was so transcendent, so otherworldly, so godly.

**CELESTIAL** ajanta dance with precision and grace.

**STAGE REVIEW**

Grace Eicher, as Temiya’s mother Chandy Devi, was of penetrating voice, yet poetically lyrical in her musically and spiritually complex role. Accompanying her meditative son, Eichann showed immense passion, grace and courage while a gentle harp illuminated Chandra’s soul. Nadlada Thamtanakorn as the Queen of Heaven and Goddess of Illusion was simply stunning. Somtow’s high notes for her were captured in a production, yet the voice found in a production, yet the voice in humanity. It offered hope that we might embrace the truth of universal love. As a tribute to His Majesty, on the very day the King exhorted his devoted people to follow the dharma and hold harmony in their hearts, Somtow could not have come up with a better endorsement of the tri-unifying power of the path to love and truth. “The Silent Prince” is an extraordinary achievement for Thailand, and a gift to the world.