

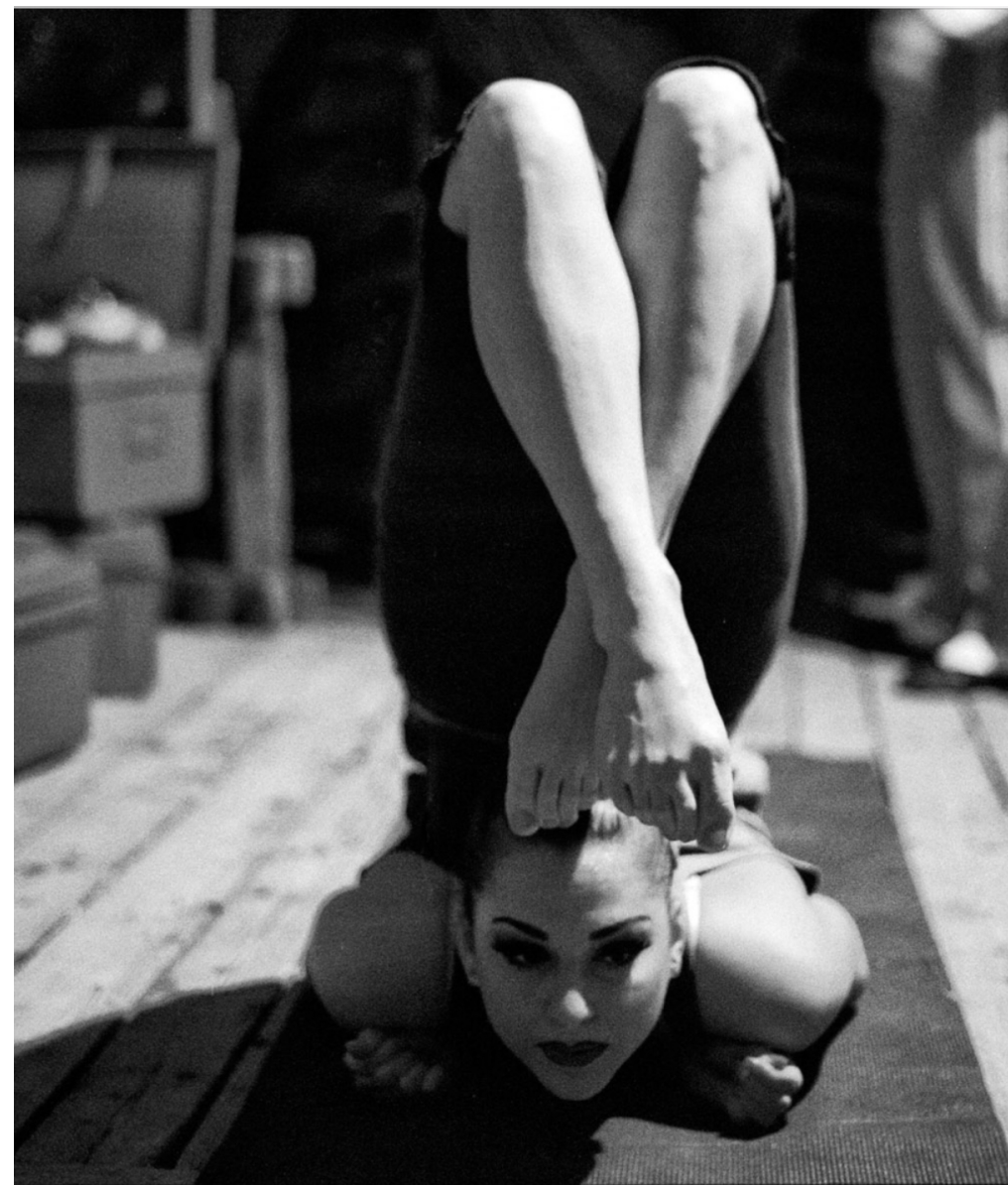
Shaped by Trees

*A Film Opera love story of Eva
and Monte that transcends
time and the ravages of aging*

Short Synopsis

Shaped by Trees is a reflection upon a scandalous love affair fastened to the dark cavities of a collapsing Alzheimer's afflicted mind.

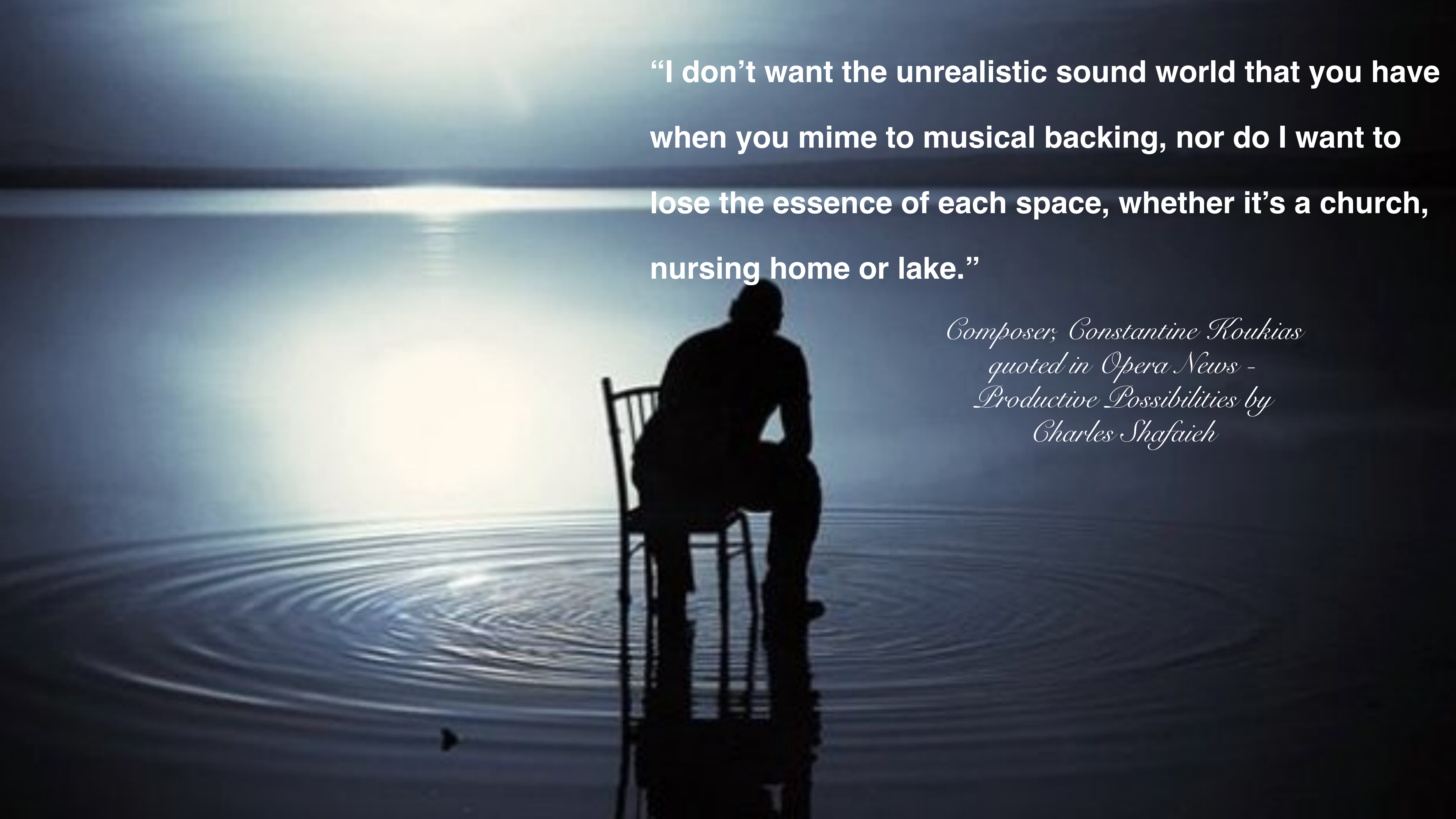
Eva has led a wild, and unconventional life on the fringe of the respectable society of 1950's Australia. She meets Monte, a student of the Clergy, when he enters the club where Eva works as an exotic dancer, the pair embark on a torrid love affair.



Why?

Dementia as a late stage in the life of contemporary man is becoming more and more common. This unusual brain dysfunction leaves behind armies of seniors who live on the border of reality and fiction. Identity issues are recognised as one of the burning issues of our time, the touching topic of dementia lends itself to open discussion of broader issues of human identity as a very fragile construct.

In contrast to musicals, film opera as a genre is still very much unexplored territory. Using an opera as a narrative form will bring fresh and authentic layers to the trans-generational story of IMPOSSIBLE LOVE.



“I don’t want the unrealistic sound world that you have when you mime to musical backing, nor do I want to lose the essence of each space, whether it’s a church, nursing home or lake.”

*Composer, Constantine Koukias
quoted in Opera News -
Productive Possibilities by
Charles Shafaieh*

Story Summary

We meet Eva as a frail old lady in a nursing home.

Sitting next to Eva is old Monte and their clergy son Augustine. Eva approaches the window. On the other side of the glass, she sees herself in her early youth.

Lucid dreamlike sequences of family quarrels in sparingly decorated rooms give way to Eva's escape into the world of books, and her imagination.

The first meeting with Monte, a passionate student of the Catholic church, happens when his curiosity gets the better of him and he enters the club where Eva works her days as an exotic dancer. Through the deception of memories, the visitors of the club disappear. The two of them remain ready for forbidden love.


Monte is torn between his duties and fidelity to Christ and his passion for Eva. He surrenders to his youthful lust.

Young Monte and Young Eva in the Garden of Eden: Eva tells him how the trees whisper, talk, and play with her and that she and Monte belong together. The rigid Monte refuses this offer, comparing their tryst to the first sin committed under the same female name. His darkness is brought out by his fear of these new feelings.

Monte shares his temptations as penance and arrogance with a fellow seminary student: Eva obsessively mocks him when he is performing prayer. Eva is pregnant.

Monte does not want the baby. Everything spins out of control.

Back in the nursing home, Old Eva talks to demons of betrayed dreams and unjust suffering. Old Monte tries to comfort her memories with a different perspective. Old Eva fails to recognise their only child. Tears roll down her face. Monte wipes them. In her mind, she is at the lake and she slips into the woods. From the landscape of unreliable memories. Old Eva opens her eyes in the nursing home. Only to speak out one final emotion.



“Every U.S. company talks about bringing in young audiences and making opera exciting, to which I say, look how TV and film work...If you’re putting things onto a screen, it’s ‘visual first’, but that doesn’t mean the content can’t be based in music.”

*Director, James Darrah
quoted in Opera News -
Productive Possibilities by
Charles Shafaieh*

World

The movie follows an inconceivable partnering of two very different people both in habitus and in culture. While Eva embodies the Dionysian and libertine forces that celebrate passion, lust and defiance of authority, Monte is a follower of the church and its rigorous canons.

The world of the story, while visually highly stylised in design, is a small-town setting in Australia. During the Second World War period, in Eva's early childhood The Great Depression and War placed enormous strain on family life. It is in the same town during the 1950's when Eva and Monte meet, and the early 2000's when Eva is in nursing home care. In the 1940's and the 1950's, the township consists of rudimentary building structures surrounded by the bush and located nearby a large lake.



Tone and Style

The film covers three periods of Eva's life in a non-linear narrative as her mind collapses and she slips in and out of the present:

1. Demented period in a nursing home,
2. Eva's youth and troubled growing up.
3. Her one moment clarity.

As a film opera, the text, created by Pezzimenti, is a poetic and captivating dialogue that will be mostly sung, with additional dramatic narrative that will be spoken. Koukias' award-winning musical composition adds to the overall impact of the story, creating a mesmerising experience for the audience.

AESTHETICS OF THE FILM: REACHING UNIVERSAL THROUGH PARTICULAR

Our film opera will use a colour palette aesthetic and visual style inspired by films such as “Mulholland Drive” by David Lynch and “Otto e mezzo” by F. Fellini.

At the same time, we will anchor the film in the natural beauty of Australia, using its landscape, mentality, architecture, and other specifics to create a strong autochthonous stamp. We will take inspiration from literature, such as “The Plains” by Gerald Murnane, to create a unique and authentic Australian experience.

To heighten the stylistic production design, we will use some VFX to create dreamlike sequences as Eva drifts between the story worlds of the present and the past. This will add layers of visual emotional depth.



Photo credit: Mulholland Drive

Character Descriptions

EVA Exotic dancer (Soprano)

Remembering EVA Eva, later in life (Soprano)

Young EVA Speaking voice

MONTE Aboriginal seminarian student (Baritone)

AUGUSTINE Catholic priest (High Baritone)

ENSEMBLE:

Flute – (Piccolo), Oboe – (English Horn), Soprano
Saxophone,

Trumpet, Trombone, Bassoon – (Contra Bassoon),

Ondes Martenot, Strings, Harpsichord, Piano, and
Percussion (3 players) with Pre Recorded Tape.



Photo credit: Leo Drumond

EVA

Exotic dancer (Soprano)

The title character, Eva is independent and not gagged by tradition or falsehood. A free-spirited woman, freshly unconventional, who does everything with endless passion.

She is intoxicating and unfaltering in her courage, but there is also sadness in her freedom. A radiant woman who has always wanted real love yet finds herself in a most unremarkable, soulless place of lechery surrounded by lonely, greedy men. Uncannily, her work in the shadows as an exotic dancer returns her to another dim place years later—the result of an impassable disease that distorts and obstructs her entire existence. She is spiritual, beautiful, intelligent, and rebellious.

Remembering EVA

Eva, later in life (Soprano)

Eva in her later years takes us back and forth in time within her troubled mind. She is a weary old woman damaged by grief, love, and deception. Still wise and perceptive, however, she takes us to her dark places as she battles Alzheimer's. Both deceitful and faithful, her memories fight as we observe a tired woman haunted by a past that is unreliably bleak and divinely real. Throughout her sickness, demons stalk and defile the love she once enshrined.

Young EVA

Speaking voice

“A sixteen-year-old Eva, she gives us a glimpse of her abusive family life. She spends most of her time when home in her sparse room reading poetry. She focuses on one poem, “Shaped by Trees,” which she loves for its mystical, soothing warmth. It is this poem that has cloaked her and comforted her throughout her young life while, outside her bedroom walls, she hears her parents loudly arguing, their marriage one of cruelty and selfishness. Idealistic and mature for her age, she lives in an imaginary world of relief against the hostility of her parents and loves nature, dancing, and enchantment.



Eva - commissioned concept art by Drika Prates...

MONTE

Aboriginal seminarian student (Baritone)

Monte, an Australian Aboriginal adopted at birth, was raised in a very strict Catholic family. We meet him as a young seminarian student who is proudly disciplined and who blindly believes in the absolute power of the Church, which provides him an environment of power and influence for which he is well-trained. Yet, there is an unlikely side to him that reveals itself slowly. He has a charming sense of humour and a tender, compassionate heart. Like Eva, he, too, is restless, which fosters the lusty, unpredictable side to his principles and beliefs—a side that shows itself after he enters a strip club, out of curiosity rather than lasciviousness, on the extraordinary evening that he meets an uncommon woman who unleashes his deeply buried sensuality and awakens an earthy but also sacred spirit within him.

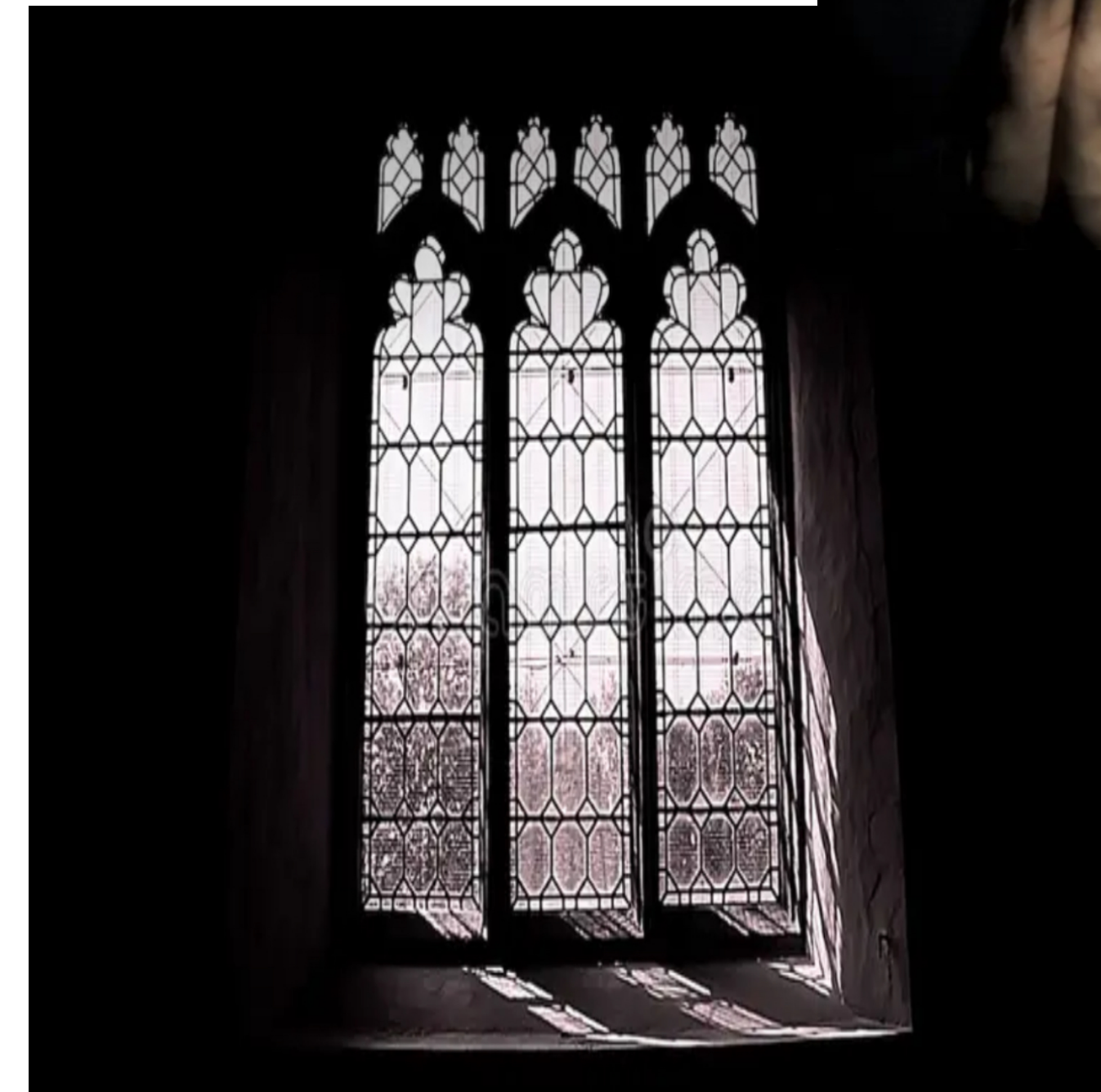
Monte is an idealistic and disciplined seminarian student with a non-negotiable belief in the Church and its power. Order and ceremony defines his world, in which truth is only found in Christ's words. But one extraordinary evening, he meets a young exotic dancer, an uncommon woman who in a moment serves all the sensual appetites to a man who has only known measured aloofness and preparation for the priesthood. At this moment, his life is changed. He will remain in conflict with his immovable, dominating church and his love for Eva.

Monte's spiritual aspirations begin to flicker brightly, like the light in Eva's mind, as their love for each other ignites. The two lovers are at a dangerous crossroads in their young lives. They carelessly break traditions and, in doing so, are become exposed raw and exposed. They are left with only mercy, beautiful lust, and sanctuary within nature's indomitable spirit.

AUGUSTINE

Catholic priest (High Baritone)

A kind, gentle priest, calming and caring to the patients in the nursing home. He is the son of Eva and Monte.



Creators



Biasino William Pezzimenti
Librettist

Biasino William Pezzimenti is a writer/poet. He has over 30 years experience working in television and radio.

During the 1990's, Biasino was Vice President on the Board of Directors for and Chair of the Marketing Committee for several years with the Irish Classical Theatre Company in Buffalo, New York.

The author of numerous radio segments and provocative satirical comedy skits, he wrote and co-produced many wild and darkly humorous commercials on radio stations in Buffalo, New York. He has received numerous accolades for his writing including the Best Radio Commercial at the New York State Broadcast Awards

Biasino wrote the lyrics and co-wrote the acoustically moving love song 'Still Life' with a New York City based singer-songwriter. It was recorded in the Fast Folk Magazine label and archived by Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.

His self-published book of poetry, *Shooting Ghosts* is considered forthright, confronting and at times darkly comedic. Shaking down the branches that hold the modern world together.

Biasino has trained English and non-English media executives and senior managers in the US, Brazil, Australia, Japan, Great Britain and Canada.

[YouTube.com/@biasinopezzimenti](https://www.youtube.com/@biasinopezzimenti) for Biasino's audio poetry channel



Constantine Koukias
Composer

Constantine Koukias is a producer of music, opera, and film.

Based in Amsterdam since 2013, he has created productions for the stage and screen ranging from large-scale music theatre and opera to mobile installation art and digital events.

His production-design credits from a career spanning over four decades include the internationally acclaimed *Days and Nights with Christ* (1990), *To Traverse Water* (1992), *MIKROVION (Small Life – 36 Images in a Phantom Flux of Life)* (1994), *Medea* (1995), *Odyssey* (1995), *PULP – An Industrial Opera* (1996), *The Divine Kiss* (1998), *Sea Chant* (2001), *Tesla – Lightning in His Hand* (2003), *The Barbarians* (2013), *Backwards from Winter* (2018), and *A Deep Black Sleep* (2023).

In 1993, he was commissioned by the Sydney Opera House Trust to compose the large-scale music-theatre piece *ICON*, in celebration of the building's twentieth anniversary.

He has been commissioned by the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in Hobart, Tasmania, for *Kimisis – Falling Asleep* (2010), *The Barbarians* (2013), and *Before the Flame Goes Out* (2017). *A Deep Black Sleep*, a film-noir opera, premiered at the MONA FOMA festival in 2023.

Since 2018, Koukias has produced two short films: *A Day in June* (2018; dir. Peter Seiben) and *The Pain of Others* (2023; dir. Slaviša Drobnjaković). He is currently in planning and pre-production stages for *Eros & Thanatos* (2024; dir. Drobnjaković) and *Shaped by Trees*.

From 2024–2027, he will be producing a series of documentaries and performances for the new work *Primordial*.

Script Sample

EVA (35) European, soulful and sexually powerful is in a panic.

Her shoes are splashing through the mud, they are dirty and ripped. Intense beams of light cut onto the water of the lake through smoke / mist. This intense light is the 'Manifestation of Christ' for her.

CUT TO:

Eva is kneeling at a lake's edge.

EVA (SINGING)

Christ, you know you rule.

I only want this one man

you have thousands of schools from Rome to Amsterdam,

from São Paulo to Depew,

men ready and armed to oblige,

to keep you safe and regally alive. I found him and he found us,

we both love him to death, like a parents trust,

with a child's first step.

NUNS (O.S.) are underpinning Eva's voice. It feels like a long time ago, they chant in a foreign – otherworldly language.

EVA (CONT'D)

hold their hands protect their hearts they are your children together or apart

So Christ, what do you say, forgive me, but, let me have my way.

Just give him to me

and I promise I'll pray.

Vienna Recording Session



FREE ZONE

FILM FESTIVAL

“The Free Zone Film Festival recently had fruitful discussions with Constantine Koukias, the driving force behind Foundation IHOS Amsterdam. IHOS are currently developing a feature film based on an opera written by Biasino William Pezzimenti and Constantine Koukias.

It’s a love story that touches on some big themes such as lust, betrayal and the aging mind. We’ve had the pleasure of hearing some of the music, we’ve reviewed the screenplay and we believe this project has the potential to be a pathfinder in its genre.

We have asked IHOS to keep us informed as the project is developed further. We believe this film will work brilliantly for our audience and we would love to see it as part of our program”

Rajko Petrovic., director.