

Volcano & Vision

Rainer Linz

Volcano & Vision, a chamber opera for three singers and instrumentalists, was first produced by the Calculated Risks Opera Co. in 1990, directed by Nigel Kellaway. (A workshop presentation of the first act was produced at the National Playwrights' Conference in Canberra, 1987.)

The idea for the work was put forward by artist Paul Greene, who in 1987 had produced a series of paintings on the same theme. As the title suggests, the text of the opera is concerned with two main ideas:

1. The Volcano - symbol of natural power, catastrophe and upheaval, and
2. The Vision - symbol of supernatural power, divination and contact with elemental forces.

These combine to form an allegory of order and disorder, and of what constitutes belief. Theatrically, the opera is divided into three acts.

Act I describes a mystical journey of revelation (or so it seems) as two anonymous characters warn of a volcanic eruption which they have foretold through a vision. The act develops through a series of interludes designed to accompany scenic representations, centred on the volcano. These interludes, 'Interlude with Rumbles', 'Interlude with Smoke', 'Interlude with Lightning', etc., are interspersed with whimsical, quasi-religious narratives concerning the vision. There are aspects of irony in the text which are reflected in the vision, an obscure amalgam of fiction and reality produced as a 'magical demonstration' at the end of this act.

Act II consists of a number of short scenes depicting the aftermath of the vision. Explained as 'mutual interdependence through cosmic intervention', the vision is broadcast on the evening news along with the weather. A political prisoner is brought before the authorities and makes a frank confession, while a woman sits at home with a doll-like replica of her husband, awaiting his return from the war.

Act III sees the characters arrive from their journey and prepare themselves for their new task. Scene 3 (music below) depicts them attempting yet another magical demonstration, to be used as evidence of the vision's profound influence. Using mud and feathers attached to their bodies they re-enact the rising of the Phoenix. However, the tenor's own fear of failure ensures he will not succeed, and his fate is sealed. Their demonstration complete, the characters learn of a new vision that has emerged elsewhere. Intrigue and offerings follow. It is suggested that the characters may not be amenable to this new vision but, things being what they are, they could find the next one more to their liking.

Musically, *Volcano & Vision* avoids the angular vocal lines found in more recent operas; movement by semitone pervades the entire piece. The flatness of the melodic line is intended to reflect the similar quality of colloquial speech and to enhance the intelligibility of the text. The harmony in the opera is entirely consonant, yet is not 'tonal' in that functions are not ascribed to chord progressions. The absence of dissonance precludes functional tonality, and the music relies instead on a constantly rising and falling melodic line for forward momentum.



Ian Cousins (baritone) in the 1987 National Playwrights' Conference production, Canberra.

VOLCANO & VISION

ACT III

Scene 3

Text: Paul Greene

Music: Rainer Linz

$\text{♩} = 108$

(from: the Exercise scene)

(Tenor) *f*

(The tenor rubs the mud over his chest and begins to attach the feathers when he is overcome by fear.)

How this mud burns!

(Strings) *mp*

8

As it should, more deep-ly than I i - ma-gined. I am in ter-ror, I can-not move, am I dead? Have I died?

mp

14

Dust starts to set-tle, o- ver the dust will come the moun- tains and o- ver the moun- tains, let this be my

f *dim.* *mp* *f* *Pesante*

(str. & ww)

f *dim.* *mp* *f* *Pesante*

21

tomb. *rit.* *molto*

(He recognises his failure and, offering excuses, lies down to prepare for his fate.)

(+8va)

(+8vb)

rit. *molto*

a tempo

28

May- be I've not wai- ted long e- nough... Just lay here, be qui - et... And may-be then in a lit - tle while,

f *dim.* *f*

loco

(strings)

f *dim.* *f*

Faster (♩=120)

81

(spoken)

so light. Good eve-ning to you once again! This wind is too light. Per-haps it is

88

stron-ger o-ver there in that tree; or bet-ter still, there on that hill; no, there on that mountain;

98

♩=100

(Soprano) *mf*

or on the Moon; a rocket per-haps: may-be Mars? Take care, take care,
(The baritone begins to climb the ladder)

(Strings)

108

for to fall is not to fly. Quite dif-ferent: the na-ture of your

(+ ww)

117

task is to fly. O-blige your-self as a bird, have no

(Baritone) *f*

So spec-ta-cu-lar to fly from Mars

(ww & brass)

124

fear. It is al-ready done.

(spoken)

or from the Moon, or from a ro-cket per-haps, no! This lad-der will do.
(He jumps)

(to: "Magnificent", tutti)