

UFO POTPOURRI

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FIRST DAYLIGHT DISK

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE METEOROLOGICAL SOCIETY (1873, v.1, n.6) reported a light gray circular object with appendages and a semicircle shape near its center was seen moving against the wind below the clouds. The date was March 22, 1870.

This bit of information was extracted from the "Catalog of UFO-like Data Before 1947", compiled by Louis Winkler, Ph.D., and is available from the FUND FOR UFO RESEARCH, Mt. Ranier, MD 20822.

ABDUCTION, ALIENS AND HOLOGRAMS

Four people driving near Indio, California during the month of December 1940 had an abduction experience. It wasn't covered by the newspapers of that day because no one really cared. Several years later Betty and Barney Hill reported a similar encounter as reported by author John G. Fuller in the book INTERRUPTED JOURNEY. A lot of people read the book with interest. Later, a movie version of the book was made for television and the audience became even larger.

The evolution of the abduction experience during the past decade has been even more interesting. The tabloid press made the UFO abduction experience a household word through mass distribution of stories at the supermarket and drug store checkout lanes. Serious work was going on as well. Budd Hopkins published MISSING TIME and Raymond Fowler the ANDREASSON AFFAIR. The UFO community had the abduction experience covered.

Next, it became clear that the advertising industry had recognized the market value of abductions when they reached the beer and soft drink crowd through colorful television advertisements depicting the abduction experience. Abductions were then a household word.

Children's books brought the concept to young children across the country. Sitcoms made abductions comical, something for adults to laugh at and internalize after a hard day at the factory. A nighttime soap opera reached another crowd when the COLBY's built an abduction into their final show.

And so it goes, segment after segment of the population has been exposed to the abduction experience through the media, while the number of confessed abductees has steadily grown. The final segment of society heretofore untouched by the abduction experience is the opera crowd.

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Then came composer Philip Glass with his Houston Grand Opera production of *THE MAKING OF THE REPRESENTATIVE FOR PLANET 8*. This opera was only the beginning. He will follow it with *1000 AIRPLANES ON THE ROOF*. As the *TIME* magazine article shown below describes, Glass has taken the classic abduction experience to the opera. And if this is not enough Glass has replaced conventional sets with advanced technology holographic projections. No segment of our society has been left untouched.

The Opera As Science Fiction

Philip Glass turns to psychodrama, part Freud, part Kafka

Is there a busier contemporary composer than Philip Glass? The prolific minimalist seems to be everywhere these days, churning out operas, film scores and instrumental music with the tireless industry of an 18th century Kapellmeister. Unlike Haydn, though, Glass has no Prince Esterhazy to keep him in livery, only his appetite for work. In May his *The Fall of the House of Usher*, based on Poe's grisly tale, opened in Cambridge, Mass. Seven weeks later, the Houston Grand Opera premiered his operatic setting of Doris Lessing's novel *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8*. Now, and most spectacularly, comes *1000 Airplanes on the Roof* in Vienna. The production will tour 39 U.S. and Canadian cities beginning in the fall.

Glass has always been an enthusiastic collaborator, working with Theater Artist Robert Wilson in *Einstein on the Beach*, fellow Composer Robert Moran in *The Juniper Tree* and Choreographer Twyla Tharp in *In the Upper Room*. But *1000 Airplanes* may be his most daring ensemble effort yet, involving Chinese-American Playwright David Henry Hwang and Scenic Designer Jerome Sirlin. The trio has produced a science-fiction music drama that is part Freud, part Kafka and part Steven Spielberg.

A 90-minute work for a speaking actor and small ensemble of synthesizers, amplified winds and wordless soprano voice, *1000 Airplanes* resurrects the hoary genre of the melodrama. As a musical term, melodrama refers to a composition in which one or more actors recite to musical accompaniment. Schubert's world-weary *Abschied von der Erde* and Ralph

Vaughan Williams' radiant *An Oxford Elogy* are examples.

1000 Airplanes is the story of M. (Rocco Sisto), a timid Manhattanite who, while walking his date home one night, finds himself transported to an alien ship, where spacemen subject him to various medical experiments, then release him with a warning to forget everything. M.'s struggle to remember, and to tell the world, is at the heart of the piece.

As it is in his current Broadway hit *M. Butterfly*, Hwang's theme is otherness. M.'s experiences—in fact, his name itself—evoke images of Kafka. Like Joseph K. in *The Trial* and K. in *The Castle*, M. is a victim of circumstance. Forces beyond his control are propelling him toward a destiny he cannot understand.

"Perception is the fifth dimension," he cries in this delirious monologue, and that is just about the only dimension left to him. On Designer Sirlin's trompe l'oeil stage, the first three dimensions dissolve, shift and disappear: on the spaceship, the fourth, time, is relative and thus meaningless. By the end, a half-crazed M. (the work's title comes from M.'s description of the pounding sounds in his head) has forgotten most of his ordeal, but is left to fear that the nightmare will begin again.

The task of realizing M.'s altered states fell to Sirlin, whose credits include, in addition to opera, Madonna's 1987 "Who's That Girl" tour. The Viennese venue was striking: a section of Hangar

No. 3 at Schwechat International Airport. "We looked at a couple of beer halls, but we needed a bigger space," says Sirlin. "Then someone said there was plenty of space at the airport."

To turn the hangar into a giant theatrical "black box," Sirlin invented a brilliant three-dimensional dreamscape that uses holographic projections in place of sets to alter the show's physical and mental terrain. Nine projectors throw a kaleidoscope of images onto a small raked stage and side panels, creating a cinematic illusion in which the actor can dash up the steps of an apartment building and vanish inside or float high above New York. The shift is instantaneous—like putting a live actor into a movie. Operatic design may never again be the same.

Glass's music adds the final layer to this psychodrama, and he responds with one of his most daring scores. From the arresting opening chords that symbolize the lurking spacemen—an alien harmonic system that makes sense to them but not us—to the striking stretch of C-major that underpins poor M.'s longings for a girlfriend, this primal scream of angst surges and soars on an electric current of inspiration.

"I'm trying to invent a way for English to be used as a viable music-theater language," says the composer. "*Usher* was all sung, *The Representative* used a mixture of speech and song, and *1000 Airplanes* is spoken. But I'm still finding my way." As directed by Glass, the piece emerges as a strong statement in which the whole is, for once, equal to the sum of its formidable parts. And for those who care about contemporary music theater, that is good news.

—By Michael Walsh



Composer Phillip Glass

CURTIS/CONTRAST/GAMMA