



THE MASQUE OF CLOUDS

An Opera in Three Acts and 132 Variations

Libretto by Tom Johnson and Robert Kushner

Music by Tom Johnson

Decor and Staging by Robert Kushner

Assistant Director: Ellen Saltonstall

THE CAST (in order of appearance)

Stage managers	Janis Wenk Robert Kushner
Aurora	Susan Gayle
The Sun	William Barone
Dancing Clouds	Kathy Duncan Joyce Morgenroth Mary Overlie Ellen Saltonstall
Singing Clouds	Penney Kimbell Sylvia Lanka
The Lake	Martha Novick
The Forest	Ed Vincent
Flute	Lynn Cushman
Cello	Pamela Frame
Piano	Tom Johnson

ACT I - Morning (Variations 1-47)

The Dawn Appears

Aurora Introduces the Masque

The Sun Rises

The Newly Formed Morning Clouds Dance and Sing

(five minute intermission)

ACT II - Afternoon (Variations 48-86)

The Lake Sings

The Forest Sings

A Storm Interrupts

A Rainbow Appears

(ten minute intermission)

ACT III - Evening (Variations 87-132)

The Lake and Forest Profess Their Love

The Sun Sets

The Evening Clouds Dance and Sing

The Stars Come Out, and Everyone Joins in a Final
Nocturne

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Box 6

Traditional masques were designed for a special audience, the royal court. The court provided the themes, the funds, the audience and usually the chief actors. The form evolved under Queen Elizabeth following Italian and French precedents, quite independently from the opera and the ballet. The poet Ben Jonson and the designer Inigo Jones were the best known creators. Many composers wrote music for masques, but the only one widely remembered today is Henry Purcell, who came along just before the tradition died out.

No matter what the occasion, the traditional masque was always a celebration of the royal hierarchy. Since "The Masque of Clouds" contains no political dimension, no courtiers, no flying goddesses, no special occasion, and no grand ball, it is certainly not a masque in any strict sense. Nor was it feasible to mount a production on the massive scale typical of masques. But the choice of characters, the cosmological references (such as earth, air, fire, and water), the simple narrative, the dawn-to-dusk format, and the combination of dancing and singing are all characteristic. Our masque is thus an interpretation rather than a reconstruction.

"The Masque of Clouds" grew out of a shorter dance work by Kushner presented at the Kitchen in 1973, which involved neither text nor music. Johnson became interested in the idea as a potential opera, and active collaboration on the expanded work began in the summer of 1974.

The 132 variations which make up the music of the work are based on the following theme:



The theme is never quite stated in this pure form, though it is heard in 10 different modes and a wide variety of tempos and moods.

Tom Johnson
Robert Kushner