

**THE KITCHEN PRESENTS
MIKEL ROUSE'S MULTIMEDIA OPERA**

FAILING KANSAS



**A SOLO PERFORMANCE BY MIKEL ROUSE • WITH FILMS BY CLIFF BALDWIN
FEBRUARY 2-4, 1995 8PM
THE KITCHEN
512 WEST 19TH STREET NEW YORK CITY**

DESIGN: CLIFF BALDWIN

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7:00pm: Cocktail Reception / Auction - Silent Bidding

8:00pm: Dinner

Hudson Theater, Hotel Macklowe
145 West 44th Street
New York City

Individual Tickets for the performance are
available through The Kitchen

For further information, please contact
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THE KITCHEN
presents
The American Premiere of
FAILING KANSAS
a multimedia opera by Mikel Rouse
February 2-4, 1995

Music & Lyrics MIKEL ROUSE
Films CLIFF BALDWIN

PROGRAM

- 1 PRELUDE
- 2 THE LAST TO SEE THEM ALIVE
- 3 LIKE MY DREAM
- 4 PERSONS UNKNOWN
- 5 A BRIEF HISTORY OF MY BOYS LIFE
- 6 ANSWER
- 7 THE PRIVATE DIARY OF PERRY EDWARD SMITH
- 8 THE CORNER
- 9 IN COLD BLOOD

FAILING KANSAS is approximately eighty minutes in length and is performed without intermission.

For The Kitchen

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The opera *Failing Kansas* is the first full length work to explore the technique of vocal writing that I call Counterpoetry. Put simply, Counterpoetry is the use of multiple unpitched voices in strict metric counterpoint. *Failing Kansas* is based on the events surrounding the murder of the Clutter family in Holcomb, Kansas and inspired by the examination of those events in Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*.

My goal in writing the opera was twofold: to explore this new vocal writing technique (a parallel may be drawn with Capote's desire to initiate a new art form: the non-fiction novel), and to capture the intention of this story without resorting to a re-telling of the tale (there has already been the novel *In Cold Blood* and Richard Brooks' faithful rendition of the book to film). Because of these previous works, I was able to move beyond a narrative approach and toward the effect of pure sound; the sound of many conflicting voices assembling the story.

The libretto is composed of actual transcripts and testimony from the event as well as fragments of verse by Robert W. Service and Thomas Gray and songs by Perry Smith, who along with Dick Hickock was responsible for the murders. In addition, research on pentecostal hymns heard during this period (most notably those of the composer C. Austin Miles) are rearranged into the prism of competing spoken texts. The themes of religion, social justice, and the mystery of what we call fate all combine in this work, resting uneasily with the hope of redemption.

The opera consists of a prelude, four scenes connected by three interludes or "traveling sections", and a postlude in the form of a closing song. The four scenes are *The Last To See Them Alive*, *Persons Unknown*, *Answer*, and *The Corner*. These scenes develop complex vocal relationships and share thematic material while adding new voices as the opera progresses.

The interludes are *Like My Dream*, *A Brief History Of My Boys Life*, and *The Private Diary Of Perry Edward Smith*. The interludes serve two main functions: 1) to introduce a wider variety of spoken vocal techniques and 2) to provide a respite from the dense vocal counterpoint of the four main scenes.

There are two sets of musical themes throughout the piece and these separate themes are divided between the four scenes and the interludes. The first set of themes are presented in *The Last To See Them Alive*. They are as follows:

A1) An arpeggio figure in 4/4 in the key of e which resolves to CMAJ7. Superimposed over this figure is a resetting of the pentecostal hymn *In The Garden* which retains the original's half-time meter but abandons the melody and harmony. This theme is stated at both the beginning and the end of the first scene, foreshadowing its importance as the closing theme of the opera at which time it is joined by a chorus of spoken voices which gradually enter a line at a time, gathering together the ninth stanza of Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*.

A2) A metric figure of 3+3+1+3 with a chord progression of A-f#-c#-D + A-c#-D-E is combined with a spoken figure in 4/4 of a ballad by Perry Smith. This theme is restated in *Answer* over a comprehensive listing of highways and hotels, motels, rivers, towns, and cities.

A3) A simple melodic figure in the key of F with alternating accents of 3 and 2. This theme falls in the middle of an arc (A+B+C+**D**+C+B+A+**D**) in *The Last To See Them Alive* as well as serving as the closing. It reappears in *Persons Unknown* in extreme augmentation, alternating keys in an arc of A-G-F-G-A.

The second set of themes are found in the interludes and consist of various permutations of the following figures:

B1) A syncopated motif of 3+4+4+4+4 which expands or contracts depending on the instrumentation: harmonica/strings (expand), guitar/keyboard (contract).

B2) A small melodic motif with an implied tonal center of e. The cyclical nature of this melody compliments the texture of the multiple voices. The repeating fragment is reharmonized to C at the end of *The Private Diary Of Perry Edward Smith*.

The Prelude combines both sets of themes. Harmonicas double strings in long tones of 3(6) against 2(4) permutating the second set of themes. A solo harmonica then states the first set of themes over this constant shifting of sound.

The opera is "topped off" by the closing song *In Cold Blood*. The import of the opera is perhaps suggested in the line "Asleep among the Son of God's disease" where "Asleep among" (plural) suggests a gathering together, while "the Son of God's disease" (singular) implies a sacred contradiction. In this contrary grammatical message lies the meaning of this opera.

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CLIFF BALDWIN/FAILING KANSAS BACKGROUND

The films presented in *Failing Kansas* are the culmination of 5 years work by Cliff Baldwin. These silent films forego traditional narrative and present themselves as purely conceptual images. They operate as black and white moving snapshots, or capsules of personality, location and phrase.

They form a series of three groups as People Films, City Films and Word Films. People Films purely record how we look at and read each others faces and character. The premise being that people love looking at other people. City Films document the way urban centers function and thrive. They give us an objective point from which to view the places we might be. Word Films extract phrases and signs from the environment, and examine the landscape of advertising and electric messaging that we have erected around ourselves.

The films were adapted to create a new whole, *FAILING KANSAS*. They were shot in Super 8 and 16 millimeter in New York, Kansas City, Chicago, Paris, Frankfurt, Cologne, and Zürich.

MIKEL ROUSE was born in 1957 in St. Louis, Missouri. He attended the Kansas City Art Institute and the Conservatory of Music at the University of Missouri at Kansas City. Rouse moved to New York City in 1979, where he studied African and other World Musics and began his study of the Schillinger Method of Composition.

Upon moving to New York, Mr. Rouse formed his contemporary chamber ensemble, Mikel Rouse Broken Consort, consisting of keyboard, electric guitar/bass, woodwinds, and percussion. With Broken Consort, Rouse has produced numerous recordings including *Soul Menu* (1993), *A Lincoln Portrait* (1988), *A Walk In The Woods* (1985), which appeared on the New York Times list of the ten best records of 1985; and *Jade Tiger* (1984).

Additional recordings span a variety of genres including pop: *Etudes* (1980), *Set The Timer* (1985), *Social Responsibility* (1987), and *Against All Flags* (1988), which was the New York Times Pop Album of the week upon release; electronic: *Colorado Suite* (1984), and *Quorum* (1984), the first piece of its kind for sequencer. This music was used for Ulysses Dove's *Vespers* and presented by The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater from 1987 to the present. It has also been filmed by David Hinton for PBS's Great Performances.

In 1989 Rouse began work on the opera *Failing Kansas* (1994), inspired by Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. This led to an emerging art form he calls Counterpoetry, which involves the use of multiple unpitched voices in counterpoint. Other works that explore this technique include *Living Inside Design* (1994), a collection of extended spoken songs and *Autorequiem* (1994), for strings, percussion, and voices.

Other works include *Book One*, a book of string quartets and *Two Paradoxes Resolved*, a piano suite. Rouse has received numerous awards from Meet the Composer, the New York State Council on the Arts and ASCAP. In 1994 he was nominated for the CalArts Alpert Award in the Arts. He currently resides in New York City.

CLIFF BALDWIN was born in 1960 in Salem, Massachusetts. He graduated the Kansas City Art Institute in 1982 with a BFA in Sculpture and Video.

Between 1983 and 1986 he published *AQUI!* magazine, collaborating with artists such as Barbara Kruger, Les Levine, General Idea, Steve Gianakos, Gilbert and George, and Jonathan Borofsky. Cliff's work has been shown internationally and is in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, The Walker Art Center, The Atlanta College of Art, Rhode Island School of Design Museum, and The Franklin Furnace.

Cliff has also collaborated with Fluxus artist Davi Det Hompson to form the word art team of **BALDWIN+HOMPSON** exhibiting in Cologne, Tokyo, Dallas, and San Francisco, and Kansas City multimedia artist Reverend Dwight Frizzell on national radio broadcasts and media mixes. In addition he has recently been commissioned with a Rockefeller grant to create a site-specific word sculpture in Mexico City this spring.

Cliff Baldwin collaborated with Mikel Rouse in 1993 on Counterpoetry/Digital Films which premiered in NYC.

Other films by Cliff Baldwin include *TEN FILMS IN TWENTY MINUTES, THIS FILM WILL BE VIOLENT* and *20 FILMS*.

THE KITCHEN GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE SUPPORT OF THE FOLLOWING CONTRIBUTORS:

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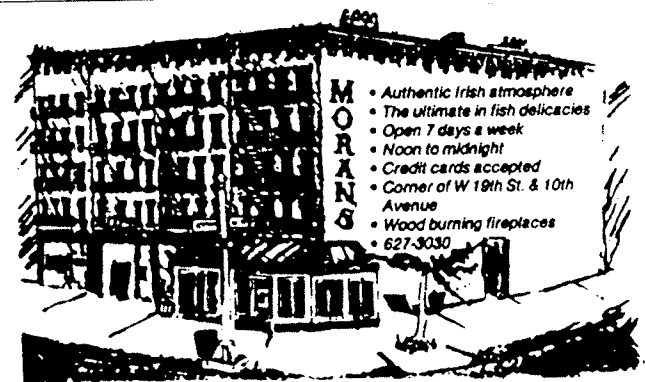
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