

Saw "**Everest**" tonight -- the opera about the 1996 Mount Everest climb that went so dreadfully wrong. There was only one thing I didn't like about the production so I'll get that out of the way first -- that fake Texas accent by the singer playing the role of Dr. Beck Weathers. The opera would have been fine without a fake accent. We know he's a Texan.

BUT...

Joby Talbot is my favorite contemporary composer, and boy did he deliver!!! The orchestra was on the stage, and the orchestra was the mountain, and the orchestra was the weather. I gotta say, the orchestra was the star of the show, and the percussion section was the star of the orchestra. And by having the mountain big and loud taking up almost the entire stage, you really got a sense of perspective about how tiny we humans really are in the grand scheme of things.

The singing was stirring, done mostly by a chorus of singers standing in an unlighted strip between the orchestra and the main characters. The leads sang beautifully without any operatic gymnastics (other than the fake Texas accent), just solid story telling.

The libretto was brilliant. Gene Scheer spent many many hours interviewing survivors of the doomed expedition, and built his libretto from their words. The lyrics were simple words but they expressed complex ideas: Do you know when you begin to gently let go? Is this how it ends? I love you.

One of the most impressive bits for me (aside from the orchestra) was the movement. The movement coach was not listed in the program, so I can only assume it was the stage director. On stage there was a small pyramid of blocks (three blocks high, max) representing the peak of Mount Everest. To see these singers struggling to climb the last few feet to the top was



some of the best movement I've ever seen on stage, much less in an opera. Ditto for the rescue effort of the guide trying to save one of his climbers. Everything was so precise and at the same time so believable. I felt like I was taking a master class in physical performance, at no extra charge!!!

So there you have it. I am sooooooooooooo glad I got to see this amazing work. There's one more performance tomorrow at 2:30. Even if you're not an opera lover, this piece will move you.

— Chris Humphrey on Facebook, January 25, 2020