

EVEREST OPERA SYNOPSIS

Joby Talbot, composer; Gene Scheer, librettist

Everest follows the true-life stories of three climbers, Rob Hall, Doug Hansen, and Beck Weathers as they attempt to summit Mount Everest in 1996. Throughout the opera we move between the climbers' present realities on the mountain, that of their loved ones and their pasts as they slip in and out of consciousness.

From the shadows of Mount Everest, the spirits of all those who have died attempting to reach the summit sing to Beck Weathers, who is unconscious on the mountain's South Col, the final stop in the push to reach the summit. These ethereal spirits now turn their attention to Rob Hall, the expedition leader and guide, who is just reaching Everest's highest peak at 2:30 p.m., thirty minutes past the safe turnaround time. Rob sees his client Doug Hansen a mere forty feet below.

The scene shifts back to Beck Weathers. In his unconscious, dreamlike state, the stranded climber hallucinates that he is enjoying a Texas barbecue in his backyard. Beck holds court and begins to describe his experiences on Everest. Suddenly, from the edge of Beck's consciousness, the voice of his daughter Meg sings to him.

As we see Rob straining to help Doug reach the summit, time stops, and Doug sings an aria in which he describes the tormenting, deep-seated obsession that has led him to this moment. Rob takes a picture of Doug at the instant he has achieved his goal, and the guide is jarred by the memory of photographing his pregnant wife, Jan, before leaving their home in New Zealand for the Himalayas.

While Rob endeavors to get his client down from the summit of Everest, we see Beck lying, delirious, on the South Col. Once again, his daughter calls out to him in vain. From the depths of his consciousness, ruminations on his struggle with profound depression slowly merge with the memory of the events that took place on the climb earlier that same day. Rob is increasingly desperate. He has a disabled client on the top of the mountain as the storm begins raging around them both. Jan, Rob's wife, is contacted and told of her husband's life-threatening situation.

Beck, beginning to emerge from his coma, sees the climbers on the South Col huddling together in a frantic attempt to survive the storm. Beck's internal soliloquy slowly allows him to make sense of what is happening and comprehend the cold, hard truth: he is dying.

In a quartet, Doug, Rob, Jan, and Beck sing of their plight. As the quartet concludes, we see Rob propelling Doug toward a sheltered spot on the South Summit, where he hopes they can make it through the night.

Beck has finally awakened to the harsh reality that if he is going to survive another hour, he will have to save himself.

Synopsis courtesy of Opera Parallèle.