



*Pike's Dream* is a work of approximately 45 minutes. It was commissioned by the Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum and performed by faculty and students of the Colorado Spring's Conservatory in the summer of 2006 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Zebulon Montgomery Pike's western expedition, during which he explored much of the Southwest including present-day Colorado.

The story begins on April 27, 1813, when the fatally wounded Pike, now 34 years old and a general, is brought back to his flagship after leading an attack on the Canadian city of York (Toronto) during the War of 1812. Sailors and the ship's doctor enter and exit during the action as they attend to the wounded man's needs. Lying on a simple ship's cot, the dying Pike dreams/hallucinates events and people from his past.

The first phantom to arrive is Pike's father, who sings of the pain of losing a child. He recalls his son's childhood when the boy would spend long hours playing soldier and how at the close of day, Pike's mother would call him home. We hear the off-stage voice of the mother.

Pike's wife Clara now enters, another figment of the dying man's imagination. She sings of how difficult it is to be the wife of an adventurer who is gone for long periods of time, leaving her to raise children alone and worry whether she will ever see her husband again. Yet she remembers fondly how Pike courted her and how they eloped together. During Clara's song, the character of Pike as a young man appears, and they sing a duet.

The young Pike and his older, dying self briefly argue over why recognition and rewards have not come to Pike for his military and exploratory exploits. Pike's father intervenes to suggest that the fault has been Pike's association with the treasonous General James Wilkinson, about whom suspicion swirls that he and Aaron Burr plotted to found their own nation with western states and lands taken from the Spanish. However, the loyal Pike refuses to recognize his mentor Wilkinson's perfidy and admonishes the others not to criticize the man. The subject of Wilkinson arises repeatedly, always with Pike's firm refusal to find fault with him.

Frustrated and in pain, the dying General Pike calls out for a doctor, which conjures the phantom of his great friend, Doctor John Hamilton Robinson. Robinson reminds Pike of the wonderful journey the two of them and a small contingent of soldiers took to the western wilderness seven years prior on orders from General Wilkinson. Robinson, the young Pike, and the dying Pike now begin to reminisce together, detailing how they parlayed with the Pawnee nation, then sought the headwaters of the Red River in the dead of winter 1806. A climax is reached as they recall their efforts to climb a great mountain they could see in the distance. The mountain, which today bears Pike's name, was unattainable, as described in an aria sung by the young Pike and joined by the off-stage voices of the men who accompanied him on the western journey.

The young Pike and Dr. Robinson then sing a dirge-like account of being lost in the wilderness and nearly dying from cold and starvation as they sought the elusive Red River. At last, having found what they surmised to be the Red River (but what was really the Rio Grande), they crossed into clear Spanish territory, hoping to provoke a response from the Spanish and maybe save their lives.

The Spanish do arrive and conduct Pike and his party to Santa Fe. Young Pike and Dr. Robinson sing of the sumptuous reception they received, despite being nominal prisoners of the Spanish governor. At last, tired of the strange social whirl and simultaneous detention they experienced in Mexico, they find themselves being escorted back to the United States by a force of Spanish soldiers. All of the characters, including Clara, Pike's father, and the offstage voices of the other members of the expedition, sing a joyous song about going home, the opera's musical climax.

As this song ends, the older, dying Pike bitterly recalls that no glory awaited him at home, but only suspicion that he was involved in Wilkinson's plot, which had been discovered while Pike was on the western expedition. Again, Pike's father and wife try to convince him that Wilkinson is unworthy of his loyalty. But as Pike yet again rebuffs this suggestion, Wilkinson himself appears—again a trick of Pike's imagination. The diabolical Wilkinson reminds Pike that he (Pike) would have been a nobody without Wilkinson's patronage and enlists his protégé to fulfill one final order: "Go ahead of me now and prepare my way to hell!"

Clara and Pike's father renew their calls for Pike to renounce the wicked Wilkinson. Yet Pike says that, having no personal knowledge of the general's misdeeds, it would be dishonorable to do so. The other characters, as well as the off-stage chorus, now sing that even God must be moved by such loyalty to a friend. The phantom characters fade away as real-life sailors burst into the cabin and inform the dying Pike that the Americans have been victorious in capturing the city of York. They display a captured Union Jack from the battle and ask Pike what they should do with it. He motions for them to lay it under his head, as a pillow.

A young boy now enters and Pike inquires of the sailors who he is. The sailors cannot see the boy and, recognizing that Pike is in extremis, exit to find the doctor. Pike and the boy converse. The child speaks of his ambition to achieve glory on a distant battlefield. But when the older Pike explains that he has done just this, the child self, seeing the gruesome reality of death in warfare, recoils and protests that "No, no, it won't be like . . . *this*." Again we hear the off-stage voice of Pike's mother calling him. The lights go down as Pike and the boy — who we now realize is Pike as a child — answer "Coming, Mother."

Zebulon Montgomery Pike was unquestionably a brave man, but somewhat foolhardy, vainglorious, and obsessed with personal honor and patriotism. The balance of historical consensus has determined that Pike was not involved in the Burr/Wilkinson plot, but rather was an unwitting pawn in that episode. We have tried to present Zebulon Pike with all his faults, even as we celebrate his remarkable achievement in a wild, uncharted land in the dead of a particularly harsh winter. Contrary to popular supposition, Pike never

climbed the mountain that bears his name. He and three others were forced to turn back from this quest by cold and hunger in that long-ago November of 1806.

--Mark and Lauren Arnest