

“ENDGAME” for symphony orchestra
program note 2018 by the composer

The creation of this piece grew out of a long-term dialogue with enterprising Portland conductor Don Appert (Honored Artist of the American Prize, 2015), who sought me out to discover works of mine with a Jewish flavor that would be suitable for performance by his Jewish Community Orchestra. A performance of my “Elegy” for strings followed, which led to a discussion about their commissioning me to write a new work, a substantial tone poem or overture on spiritual, moral, or societal themes.

The resulting music is for both those who are pessimistic, even cynical, about the state of the world, and those who are still hopeful. It is an evocative, sometimes disturbing piece expressing my own waning hopes, fears and, yes, cynicism and even rage about the possible imminent end of the world of humans, sparked by recent spiking global increases in horrifying events and trends due to human societal errors and actions, including (but not limited to):

global scorching/climate change, melting ice caps and glaciers, rising seas, increasing catastrophic superstorms and floods, extended droughts, polluted waterways and vast oceans scummed with floating plastic, dying coral reefs, intense air pollution and holes in the ozone layer, decimation (and worse) of wildlife and habitat, frequent clusters of huge wildfires, depleted croplands, widening famine, revived plagues, and the resurgence of Fascism, anti-Semitism and other ancient tribal hatreds, genocidal local wars, civilian gun massacres, terrorist attacks, nuclear threats,

and, underlying it all, the global crumbling of the last remnants of decent, moral, balanced social and economic structures, and an impending total takeover by predatory and amoral global capital enabling totalitarian maniac dictators and universal plutocracy/kleptocracy.

I do not try to depict or dramatize all of these ills individually (in a 15-minute piece), but instead evoke key ones and build up the combined tension of them all at once—a world in cumulative, possibly terminal, global stress. The piece is like a tocsin, a last warning, a cry to mobilize for the good, for *tikkun olam*.

I raise these questions:

- Is this the end?
- Will the world of humans perish? The world of nature?
- Is it too late?
- Can we do enough to prevent it, to save or heal the world?

These are the issues that preoccupy me today. I walk in mountain forest a lot for solace. When I return to the City, it does not last.

The music itself is episodic, depictive, evocative, and full of obvious allusions and tributes to the familiar gestures and signature textures of many great Romantic and Tonal Modern classical symphonic composers. The musical style is wide-ranging, from utterly traditional-tonal sweet Mahlerian died-and-went-to-heaven beatific song, to dismal plastic decay in pure 1920’s modernist twelve-tone “harmony” and “melody,” with much music in the middle in my own

tonal-modern style. The moods range from restful and beatific through bustling and crass, with some emphatic hortatory outbursts. The orchestral writing is rich, with a lot of complex full-orchestra textures and some big *tutti* passages, interspersed with frequent play between the several choirs of instruments. The strings have some lyrical sections of intentionally heartbreaking beauty. The musical form proceeds like a series of cinematic scenes or vignettes, thematically linked both obviously and subtly, reflecting now the dire, manic human world, now the highly-impacted natural world. The music sets up a dynamic tension, as between the inexorable destructive forces of human society, and the innate human yearning (at least for some of us) to heal and restore a peaceful, beautiful, natural world tended by humans in a just and humane society. There are some horrid shocks. The ending is deliberately ambiguous. Some may hear hope, even triumph. Others will hear the last conflict and perhaps . . . The End. Hence the title, "Endgame."

The successive episodes, though not intended as realistically depictive or narrative, bear the following suggestive titles in the score:

THE HUMAN WORLD NOW
THE HUMAN MACHINE AT WORK
THE WARNING
THE CLEARCUT FORESTS
POVERTY AND INJUSTICE
PITY AND KINDNESS
THE PROPHECY
NOSTALGIC DREAM OF A BEAUTIFUL HEALED WORLD
BACK TO BUSINESS/TECHNOLOGY
POISONED RIVERS RUNNING TO THE SEA
THE TEXAS-SIZED ISLAND OF PLASTIC ON THE OCEAN
THE TURN
DETERMINATION TO HEAL THE WORLD
ANSWERING THE CALL
LAST WARNING