

## PROGRAM NOTE (by the composer)

*Sinfonietta* (Parting) is a 3-movement short symphony, scored for the Mission Chamber orchestra's complement (strings, pairs of woodwinds, horns, and trumpets, bass trombone, timpani and small percussion). It was commissioned in 2018 by Music Director Emily Ray, with whom the composer has had several successful orchestral collaborations in the past.

The work is the latest in a series of serious, sometimes grim symphonic works which I have crafted on commission in recent years. These pieces reflect my increasingly intense moral and spiritual concerns over the alarming state of the physical world of nature at our mercy, in parallel to the spiritual unraveling of a destructive global material human culture hurtling towards oblivion. The previous works have been more hortatory, sounding a tocsin for humans to awaken and take broad corrective and restorative action before it is too late—but I also fear in my gut that it already is. Lately, each time I seek solace in a natural setting—by the sea, on a mountain ridge, in forest, by a river or lake, or stargazing, I realize that I am also gradually saying good-bye to Nature—and not just because of my own mortality, but because I feel that it and we are doomed. I am left sorting through the various fearsome, once-unthinkable scenarios, known and imagined, of how it will all end, perhaps in our lifetimes. This music gives a few glimpses.

The three movements are deeply contrasting in nature, scoring, and affect.

The first movement, "Business as Usual", for the full orchestra, is an arch, vigorous, neo-classicizing formal symphonic-scale movement in a tightly-organized modified sonata form, using a brusque, bitter modern Romantic style reminiscent of the crisper Prokofiev, Hindemith, and sometimes even Tchaikovsky. This is the world of the City, of Commerce, of Government, of Politics, of the arrogant, confident, machine-like grind of War, and of the tragic, manic desperation of the billions of hapless humans trapped in that materialistic technology-enslaved web. The music may sound noble or even hopeful at times, but the final taste is bitter.

The slow movement, "Forests, Farewell", written for strings only, is a sentiment-drenched, almost melodramatic slow song-form movement straining to match Mahler at his most regretful and Shostakovich at his most bitter (I have yet to exorcise their ghosts from my composer's psyche). It is a non-developmental chain-song form, a series of melodic episodes that form an arch, singing a long farewell to the great forests, past and present, with evocations of clear-cutting, crown fire, and the beauty of the few remaining patches of climax forest.

The finale, "Expiration (the Air Departs)", starts as a potentially puzzling, quick, quirky anti-scherzo (its playfulness deceptive), pitting skittish strings against wispy, wistful winds. The air of our world is going bad, smog expanding and fresh air becoming scarcer, the ozone layer and magnetosphere thinning and the atmosphere leaking (this is not imaginary). A slow lyrical middle section evokes a final gorgeous, loving clear-night look at the jaw-dropping wonder of the Milky Way. As the stars fade and the grey glare of dawn comes up, the jumpy, sketchy scherzo returns, spinning out and winding down in stuck repetitions in the winds and odd scratching noises in the strings, until the last whiff of our planet's poisoned air whistles out to frozen space, and everything that breathes—*expires*.

*("This is the Way the World Ends . . . not with a Bang but a Whimper.")*