

FULL PROGRAM NOTES ON THE MUSIC

1. Masked Dirge (For the Victims of Plague)

This movement is dedicated to all the victims of the recent plague worldwide: the dead, the sick, the dying, the long-haul sick, and the recovered but debilitated, plus all those who have lost loved ones and all those who lost a year and more of normal life. It is like an ancient modal burial ritual, solemn, grim, the players acting as imagined Druid priests and acolytes at a mass grave.

The opening grew out of an old sketch (I never throw away a potent musical idea). The movement begins and ends with a slow, soft, continuously sustained, middle-range unison chant in rolled mallets, piano, and timpani, over a long low sustained pedal *Eb*, with occasional single high bell tone punctuations. The melody is simple, working up and down the diminished scale in steps and thirds in long phrases with pauses. The middle section changes the pedal tone to C, adding sweet low sustained C major harmony under a simple now-tonal tune. Stretto repetitions of related short rhythmic motifs lead to the crashing start of a rich, full-range harmonic texture built of crossing arpeggiated chordal figures that underlie a loud harmonized repeat of that second tune. A culminating three-fold sixteenth-note harmony tattoo with single tone answers yields to a quiet stripped-down repeat of the middle tune over a slightly soured C major harmony, then a remodulation to the opening key and quiet texture, and a simplified reprise of the opening chant, now starting on the fifth degree of the mode. The ending does not resolve the last tone, a dissonant minor second above the pedal root. It ends suspended, like an eternal question: *Why did this happen?*

2. Interrupting Cow

Here is an attempt at releasing the incredible tensions we have all built up in our bodies and spirits in the past few years. This is intended as playful music—but it has a dark or bitter overtone sometimes. The form is another of my fractured Rondo Variations, where the rondo theme, when it comes back, is not simply the normal welcome recognizable exact return but a variant, sometimes quite distorted, and in later returns a developmental canon or similar extension. The quick-jumping opening idea, again in the diminished scale (emphasizing minor thirds) just came to me while hiking, and it had a lot of power in it to generate extended music, including its essential polymetric rhythms (5s and 7s in groupings of 2 and 3 equal short notes). The next sections rely on repeated-*ostinato* accompaniments; one is a series of dancy polymeter repeated-pitch tunes in the ringing mallets, ending in the odd buildup of a floating dissonant cloud of high sustained pitches.

The return of the Rondo theme is given entirely to the unpitched percussion, with short repetitions and extensions, contrasting metals with woods with drums. A tuneful tonal transition in the middle introduces a joyous Orffian polymeter dance in F, a release of sheer joy and exuberance ending with solo timpani outbursts. (I dedicate this section to my dear friend and colleague, veteran Seattle composer John David Lamb.) But the joy does not prevail. Over another ostinato in mallets the timpani make variations on the dancy tunes and end in a short phrase-trading battle. This yields to a series of three variants on the opening diminished-scale rondo theme, each a more elaborate canon in increasing numbers of high mallet instruments, finally landing on a tutti variant in obvious *e* minor, repeating after soft low interruptions and percussion hiccups. After a last canon in stacked instruments, the last lick keeps repeating like a stuck record. The ending is a co(s)mic prank, a light raspberry as it were: An augmented statement of the Rondo theme leads to a surprise group vocalization (interrupting) before a final slam.

3. Farewells (Portraits)

This movement I built using a preconceived abstract plan for the form. (The other movements' forms grew organically and developmentally from their initial themes and later in-the-moment thematic inventions.) I wanted to do a slow movement made of little islands, solo quasi-recitatives for several of the lead pitched instruments, with light accompaniment only, and simple transitional connective passages. These successive melodies are unrelated, undeveloped, and unrepeated in the form. The affect I heard in my inner ear was sad, if not tragic. In the end I intend it to work as a sort of slow processional along a darkened gallery with several portraits of recently departed loved ones, all victims of the plague; individual expressions of loss, like the inside front page of the local newspaper where they spotlight a handful of recent COVID deaths to stand for the many. The soloists are marimba I, vibraphone I, glockenspiel, and piano. The listener may imagine whatever person or type of person they choose for each solo; I personally hear the glockenspiel solo as a portrait of a departed baby, with the music box still playing over the empty cradle.

Atmospheric colors are set up behind each solo: a quiet snare drum roll and midrange vibraphone/piano trill, plus bowed tam-tam and a few mysterious water-gong strokes and tam-tam strokes under the opening marimba solo. Wind machine and a super-low staccato walking bass line in the piano under the vibraphone solo (plus harmonic filling-out in the second vibraphone). Glass wind chime, triangle, and

bowed crotale under the glockenspiel solo over arpeggios in celesta. Bowed cymbal and little snare drum taps under the next section. And a quiet timpani roll under the piano solo.

But a “slide show” like this needs connective tissue, so in between come simple interludes, built up using a short little tattoo motive that repeats with canonic echoes and sets up a feeling of moving along, over the walking bass line. Later each repetition of that motive in each of eight overlapping instruments ends with a descending chromatic trickle like a single tear rolling down the cheek, all flowing together to create a rivulet of tears together.

My first thought about the piece was that I wanted to open the movement with a slow sad chorale in sustained (rolled) marimbas, in four and occasionally five voices, tonal, minor, ending on a half cadence, without any other instruments. The ending, over the last march music that follows the piano solo, has a final sad tune in a new key, in all the ringing mallets, followed by a slow heart-opening outcry in all pitched instruments, fully harmonized in rich tremolandos, to say goodbye for the whole ensemble. Then the marimbas get a final shorter slow chorale cadence, echoing the start, with a stretched-out full major cadence and a sweet little star button. *We will miss you all.*

4. (I want you to) PANIC (dedicated to Greta Thunberg)

Here is music intended to express—but not purge—the stresses of living in a world gone nearly mad from human-induced global climate change, huge destructive weather events, plague, wars, and the worst flaring of racial, religious, and cultural enmity, oppressive lie-soaked politicking, and autocratic rulers that I can remember in my lifetime. Greta’s famous statement to the U.N. was about the end of the natural world (and us with it) that we face if we don’t take drastic action, step off our current path, and embrace healing instead of blasting Nature. So like many of my recent pieces, it is a warning, a call to act.

This is a rich multi-themed bent sonata form with interruptions, changes of mood, many new melodies, and urgent tutti warning outbursts. The mad, driven, extended coda builds up overpowering manic energy.

DETAIL OF THE FORM:

The opening of this movement too grew out of another old sketch, percussive by nature, and its upward-leaping opening motif is highly generative—as my most potent musical ideas always are. It kicks off many variants and extension versions, plus the last button of the piece. The movement stays solidly in 4/4 time almost throughout.

A down-and-up-leaping broad dotted-rhythm high ringing theme follows. The third low anapaestic galloping theme was also a very old sketch intended for percussion. It too immediately engendered extensions and variants. As it rises, it generates a new dactylic rhythmic melody, repeatedly descending four steps in tonal minor, with counterlines in dry high mallets, and descending pounded answering cadential phrases in the bass group. A short rhythmic connector in timpani and piano sets up a short loud folk-style melody in tutti, almost cheery.

Now some development: The opening motif returns in a series of high canons, settling on long high rolled notes. A drum riff speeds up to a stubborn low-range two-beat ostinato in piano and timpani, over which is set a third major dotted-rhythm tune, in rolled high mallets over lower ringing-metal chords, building to a strong half-cadence on c minor, where the drumline introduces a firm crisp marching tattoo that establishes, then cuts off. *Silence.* Then it restarts and all the high instruments lay down a loud two-voiced warning statement in big triplets, the lower voice a static pedal, the upper jiggling up and back down the diminished scale. In between, timpani, piano bass, and low metals give loud unison answers descending the home triad. After the last warning melodic phrase, which adds a lower third to the voicing, the drumline tattoo thins, and the solo snare drum comes to a petering-out full stop. *Silence.*

Now a reprise: Again the opening motive, but in tone-clustered high mallets, its descending jumps becoming a new accompaniment to the leaping second theme, extended high, then the low galloping answer, shortened, the high extension with counterlines, broadening by augmentation, and another full stop.

Now an unexpected slower, relaxed section, starting with a gentle vibraphone ostinato in descending eighths (derived from the previous loud cadence), and a high fatalistic melody in high mallets in sixteenths related to the previous dotted-rhythm high melody, but petering out in a sort of Mediterranean cadence. Under that the low-range two-beat ostinato creeps in to double the speed, first in solo marimba, then in the bass group, and the third major dotted-rhythm tune resumes, adding doubling instruments, this time building to e minor at the cadence—where the drumline tattoo again takes over. Now the two-voice warning statements return, again three times with bass group punctuations between, but landing on solid c minor (with added bitter notes) and a totally new theme, fully tonal, in tutti, modulating upward in three statements to circle, Moebius-strip-like, back to c minor. Here the tutti breaks off and the mallets take up the drumline tattoo rhythm in high-low pairs of notes each, adding one lower instrument every two beats to create a rich texture, and the bass group lay down a foreboding motto in eighths and then quarters. At its cadence, the drumline resumes, while the high instruments add just the accents of its pattern, with high-spark answers. After this exhilarating texture is set, **the middle theme of the first movement** arrives triumphantly in the ringing high instruments.

At its cadence we go into a loud coda, the high mallets version of the tattoo resumes over just the accents in the drums, then they trade roles, then the bass motto returns; over this an air-raid siren starts up. At the next square phrase-end the tutti continue just the accents pattern while the timpani and chimes take up the tattoo, soli, all slowing through its inherent metric modulation (quarters to dotted quarters which become the beat). A huge descending-thirds tutti in quarter notes lands at a pedal C, and the high instruments, clustered chromatically, hit the opening motif one last time, hold the top notes, and all do a “dow” gliss downward to cut it loose for good.

Yes, it is exhausting watching nature crumble, parch from drought, scorch, polar ice melt in acceleration, shores drown, proliferation of volcanoes erupting, tornadoes blasting, hurricanes swirling, Tsunamis rising, and earthquakes shaking us, all far beyond any historic scale. And nobody does anything, as Greta observed. So yes, we do want you to PANIC!