

PROGRAM NOTES

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An extraordinary experience happened on the eighteenth week following my husband's sudden death. I had not been able to bring myself to go into his study. One day when I was feeling particularly down and needing to be with him, I entered the room and eventually picked up a book on his desk. A handwritten note that had been under the book was facing me. It said "Be strong and strengthened". Those words, and the experience, had a profound effect in helping me cope with grief. I decided to share this story because there may be others who could benefit from these words.

The piece opens with dissonant trombone notes along with seven loud piano clusters using as many of the 88 keys as possible, representing the devastating stroke that claimed my husband's life within seven hours. The piano pedal continues to be pressed. After the sound dies away, the trombonist turns and plays into the piano, on a single pitch, the opening rhythm of a prayer said at the burial. The overtones can be heard as the sound dissipates.

The next section illustrates some of the emotions I felt in grieving. Everything seemed surreal. There was loss, aloneness (not to be confused with loneliness), dread, some anger, anxiety. Circular figures in the music reflect my mind constantly replaying that traumatic day. I also found myself repeating certain phrases; the rhythms of some of those words are used in a recitative-like passage. This "grief" section is 18 measures long, grouped in pairs of measures consisting of 8 beats and 10 beats. A recent, as yet rarely-used trombone effect is created by removing the F-attachment tuning slide, allowing an ethereal sound to come from behind the performer when the valve is engaged by the thumb. By the time the 18th measure is reached, the trombonist will have replaced the missing tuning slide and added a Harmon mute to the trombone. This different sound represents the appearance of the message, its import being quickly understood in a short transition to the uplifting final section.

This last section is somewhat march-like and is based on the rhythm of the words "Be strong and strengthened". Even in the midst of healing, however, there are regressions. One of these will be heard when the theme is turned upside-down and fragments from the grief section reappear, soon to be overtaken by a triumphant ending.

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