

Tableaux for piano solo

Stephen JAFFE

Part I

1. Prelude; 2. Resonances (“*Rainbow Resonances*”) 3. Opposites: (A) *Anthem* (B) “*Hatred Destroys the World*”

Part II

4. Jangle

Part III

5. Partita-Variations: “*Every soul is precious*”

While over the years I have written generously for piano in chamber works, including *Homage to the Breath*, *Quartet from Arch*, *Light Dances*, and *Sonata in Four Parts*, *Tableaux* is my first solo piano work in a long time, and represents my attempt to make an original contribution to the genre, always something of a touchstone for me, as it embodies both the public and private spheres of making music.

Tableaux's music, cast in three large parts, was created for the pianist Lisa Emenheiser. The tableaux are a suite of short- to medium-length pieces of abstract, non-referential music. Above all, the music is well, just music, and specifically, music for piano solo in the solo tradition as practiced across styles and instruments from the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book to the present day. *Rainbow reflections* uses the full reverberance of the piano, with an improvisatory freedom; *Jangle's* pianism is one of percussive and rhythmic physicality; elsewhere the piano is used as if to create a multi-voice chorus. In the latter, the music also invokes literary texts, for which the composer offers the following comment:

1. In Part I, *Opposites* refers to Lithuania of the 1990s, as a young country grappling with both independence and historical memory. I use shards of street signs. *Anthem* (No. 3A) alludes to a billboard seen all over the country, with the fervent words “Buk socialiai Aktivus”—roughly “Be socially active. Hey! Who will build the country if not you?”). I imagined a chorus singing, like the choruses that played such a prominent role in Lithuania’s independence. In contrast, the imaginary chorus that sings *Hatred Destroys the World* (No. 3B) evokes historical memory. The title refers to an interview given by the late humanitarian Irene Vesaite* and to the stone marker, in Yiddish and Lithuanian, standing along Zydu Street in Vilnius commemorating the location of the Small Vilna ghetto -- where in fall 1941 more than 11,000 Jews were driven to their deaths. In *Hatred Destroys the World* it is required that the pianist speak (or half-speak) and sing in English and in Yiddish. The pianistic style might be said to evoke Busoni’s arrangements of Bach’s chorale preludes, but the embedded chorale is not a Lutheran melody; instead it evokes a complex quilt of the recent past, fragments stitched together from shards of the street. To remember, and to go on.
2. Emerging from the resonant chords that characterize *Tableaux*, Part III’s music is fashioned from an original chorale melody inspired by the phrase “*Every soul is precious*”. These words appear in *De Profundis*, an essay about a near death experience by my long-time friend and collaborator, the photographer, writer and musician Brian Peterson. (The full essay is appended in the Afterward). Returning to consciousness, the author mutters “*Every Soul is Precious*” and with great effort reaches his camera, snaps, and subsequently sends a shot out into the email ether, later asking “Why? Why did I bother?” His answer?

“what was inside was now outside. What wanted to be born, had been born...until the search for something real, something true, had a wisp of a chance to be shared with someone else.”

-In m. 86, beat 4, the wavy line next to the Bb means “scrape the wound piano string.” The duration of the scrape should be variable, but roughly half the value of the note or even shorter.