

Choosing Joy: Program Notes

Garrett Hope, *Kenosis* (notes by the composer). The title, *Kenosis*, is the Greek term for emptying oneself. In a Christian context it reflects the process of removing oneself as a hindrance to the purposes God has for us so God can complete the work he has begun. It is the process of humbling oneself before God, removing the ego, and being transformed into the likeness of Christ. The piece has seven sections and I'm doing a couple of things. I'm exploring the process of moving from harshness and complexity to simplicity and sweetness (a *kenosis* of the music, if you will). It alternates fast and aggressive sections with slower and peaceful until ultimate meditation and reflection of Christ is attained (sanctification). It's a process.

More than that I'm exploring temporal relations and the perception of time. Some research has been done that shows how the human brain perceives faster and more active music as taking more time than it actually does. Conversely, slow and meditative music is perceived as taking less time. *Kenosis*, therefore, is proportioned according to a time scale that moves from long to brief to longer again in an arch form. *Kenosis* was commissioned by Jeff Manchur in 2012.

Johannes Brahms, *Ballade in B, Op. 10, no. 4*. Brahms was in his early 20s when he wrote this work of deep introspection. Vacillating between major and minor modes, the seemingly happy key signature is undermined by sadness and yearning. What could have caused such profundity in such a young composer? Perhaps it was his recent acquaintance with Robert and Clara Schumann, the former who would promote and help establish his career, the latter who would occupy his romantic desires for the rest of his life. An element of unspoken emotion is—surprisingly for Brahms—betrayed when he explicitly asks for the melody to be played in an understated, unmarked way, hiding the song in the texture.

Samuel Barber, *Ballade, Op. 46*. Written for the 1977 edition of the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, one might expect this to be a virtuosic show-stopper of a piece. Not without its difficulties, this *Ballade*, like the Brahms, is a poetic one, rather than an epic. It also oscillates between major and minor chords, but in this case, brief moments of light are defeated by the ever-present darkness. Agitation erupts in the middle section, beginning with thunder in the lower register of the piano, before spreading throughout the entire keyboard.

Amy Beach, *Ballad, Op. 6*. A budding piano virtuoso, Amy Beach had the mixed blessing of marrying a much older man when she was 18 years old. A doctor, he was uncomfortable with her music career having a public face, so he barred her from performing regularly, but encouraged, in fact fully enabled, her life as a composer. Her husband's death when she was nearly 43 allowed her to finally establish a career as a performer, primarily of her own virtuosic works.

The *Ballad* shows off her supreme talent as both a performer and composer. A transcription of an earlier song (published later), 'My love is like a red, red rose', this is an effusive love song. (The Robert Burns text includes: "As fair art thou, my bonnie lass/So deep in love am I/And I will love thee still, my dear,/Till a' the seas gang dry.") Beach takes the beautiful melody of an otherwise unremarkable song, and expands and rewrites the work to create a passionate and virtuosic work for piano solo.

Ludwig van Beethoven, "*Eroica*" *Variations and Fugue in Eb, Op. 35*. The simplicity with which this piece opens does little to prepare the listener for the opus which is to come. After a grand welcoming chord, a pithy and clumsy succession of bass notes follows. The score reveals that this is not the theme, rather, an introduction, presenting the bass progression of the theme. Layers are added, before the melody is heard in all of its glory. This theme has been used several times by Beethoven, most notably in the finale of his 3rd Symphony, written two years later, thus, where this work gets the common title of *Eroica Variations* (with *Eroica* meaning 'heroic').

15 variations follow, of all varieties and approaches. Beethoven shows his ingenuity as a composer, particularly in how he can draw both humor and tragedy, aggression and lightness, sadness and love, out of the same theme. He joyfully embraces the theme's hammered Bb chords in variations 9 and 13. A fiery fugue follows a dark coda, but after a grand culmination, two more (unnumbered) variations follow, perhaps the most gentle and unassuming variations of them all, to close the work.