

ONLY WHEN ETERNITY NEARS

In the summer of 2008, a dear friend of my wife's lost her three year old son to a tragic and entirely unexpected farming accident. He was a special boy full of vitality, hope, wonder, and joy – everything one would hope to find in adults, much less a three year old little angel. His name was Owen and he was the only son this single mother had. From the day he was born we watched her give everything she had for him and in a matter of one second he was gone.

This piece does not simply serve as a tribute to his short three years on this planet, nor does it only aim to mourn the loss of Owen. *Only When Eternity Nears* is a snapshot of the grieving processes I have seen in the handful of months since this horrible occurrence, while at the same time celebrating just how special the life of this little boy was. Owen's three years on this beautiful planet were so rich. I am moved to think of him and hope that I will be graced with a hundred years and then some.

A suite in four movements, meant to be performed as one, *Only When Eternity Nears*, borrows from the likes of George Crumb's *Ancient Voices*, Aaron Copland's *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson*, John McLaughlin's *Mahavishnu Orchestra* works, J.S. Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, and Stravinsky's *Pétrouchka* in my own, personal ways.

I chose the instrumentation to meet the needs of the *Symphony & Steel Original Music Competition*, but the voice of a solo tenor pan to “play the part” of Owen was well under way before this competition found its way to my doorstep. Steelpan itself is a young instrument full of promise and wonder.

As if to underscore the playful vitality of Owen, I used this work (in particular, the soloist's part) to employ early resolutions of what I consider “rhythmic dissonance”. The harmonic rhythm of

ONLY WHEN ETERNITY NEARS (CONT'D)

standard phrases normally implies resolution of actual rhythm during their duration, but by “resolving” standard rhythmic ideas early one can enjoy a playful, frenetic energy without compromising audience appeal, like harmonic dissonance so quickly tends to do.

Additionally, this work was composed with the superb performances of Mr. Liam Teague in mind. Mr. Teague is the only pan virtuoso I know who can perform things like this and I have been particularly impressed not just with his musical skills, but his humble ambassadorship of such a beautiful instrument to the word. The orchestration is currently being revisited to meet the needs of more standard orchestras, while keeping individual parts relatively simple, but as it stands, I hope this will do the virtuosity of Mr. Liam Teague justice – which is simply second to none.

In this whole ordeal, I have been humbled by how people behave in the face of new life and new death. Unfortunately it seems that it is only in the face of eternity, before or after our lives pass - *Only When Eternity Nears* – that we truly appreciate how beautiful it is to be alive.

**contact composer for purchasing information*