

A Long Weight of Silence

Perusal score
Not for performance

AJ Harbison

Muse Room Press

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A Long Weight of Silence (2021)

for one flute in isolation
or
two flutes together

- i. intro
- ii. silence
- iii. denial
- iv. anger
- v. bargaining
- vi. depression
- vii. acceptance
- viii. meaning

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Program Notes

I vividly remember March 12, 2020, when a Kansas City Symphony staff member interrupted a meeting I was in to announce that the mayor had declared a state of emergency. That was the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic for me. It quickly led to the postponement, then cancellation, of a few Symphony concerts, then a month of concerts, then the entire remainder of the 2019-20 season. Thus began a long period of silence that many artists and patrons of the arts felt as a heavy weight: the “great pause” of live music, dance, and theatre.

Early in the pandemic I read an article by David Kessler, co-author of *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss*. He wrote that what everyone was feeling was a collective sense of grief. We could feel denial, anger, bargaining, and depression, sometimes within the span of a week, or a day, or even all at the same time. He encouraged his readers to let themselves feel their grief and then move through it to acceptance, where we find power to act. He also talked about the sixth stage of grief, meaning, which can bring light out of the darkness.

A Long Weight of Silence is a reflection and meditation on the pandemic through the lens of the six stages of grief. The piece is written in eight movements.

i. intro: A premonition of what is to come. The flutes introduce the primary themes of the piece through a combination of traditional playing and extended techniques: blowing air through the flute, timbral trills (using two different fingerings for the same note), and Aeolian sounds (a mix of traditional tone and air noise). Tension grows quickly, with quotes from Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony and Stravinsky’s ballet *Pétrouchka* – two pieces the Kansas City Symphony had programmed that were canceled by the pandemic. The movement ends with a frenzied run upward that is suddenly cut off.

ii. silence: This movement symbolizes the silence of canceled performances using literal silence and suggestions of it through extended techniques.

iii. denial: The performers face each other. The music tries to remain upbeat despite a growing sense of unease. Even as the performers continue facing each other, they take cautious steps backward.

iv. anger: The performers turn away from each other. The music conveys anger through tongue pizzicato, sharp trills and fluttertonguing, as well as a quotation from Brahms’ First Symphony (another canceled piece).

v. bargaining: The two flute parts try to bargain with each other, offering musical material that is quickly rejected by the other part.

vi. depression: The performers sit and revisit the lament from the first movement.

vii. acceptance: The performers stand; the lament theme is transformed into a glimmer of hope.

viii. meaning: The performers face each other again and play a repeated melodic line. The two parts are separated at first by three beats, but come progressively closer together. The performers begin to take steps toward each other. In the final measures, the two parts finally line up in unison as the piece, and the lights, fade.

A Long Weight of Silence was composed for Michael Gordon, Principal Flute of the Kansas City Symphony, who premiered the piece _____.

Performance Notes

Both parts read from the score.

An accent on a trill applies only to the initial attack.

A tenuto mark indicates both a slight emphasis and a slight lengthening of the note.

Unaccented grace notes should be played before the beat, with the normal note receiving more emphasis.

Accented grace notes should be played on the beat, with the first grace note receiving more emphasis.


The marking *n.* denotes “fading in from” or “fading out to” silence.

The direction “gradually increase [or decrease] air” indicates a gradual transition between ordinario playing and Aeolian playing (see key on next page). A transition made in the space of one beat does not include the word “gradually” but should still be made as gradually as possible.


The performer(s) should begin the piece facing the audience (or camera) in a traditional performance position. Performance directions (in boxed text) should be followed at the point where the direction begins in the score (for example, Flute 2 should turn to face Flute 1 on the downbeat of measure 36). The chairs for the performer(s) (used in the sixth movement, “depression”) should face the audience (or camera).

If possible, during measures 127 and 128, the lights in the performance space should fade to black (or, if the piece is performed by a single flutist, the video should fade to black). The lights in a live performance should stay black through the final fermata in measure 129.

Key


 Air noise: Make “sh” sound with tongue and blow into flute, with mouth covering embouchure hole

 Timbral trill; ± on fingering diagram indicates key(s) to trill

 Aeolian sounds: Make “sh” sound with tongue and blow across embouchure hole to create half unfocused/half focused tone

 Fluttertongue

 Key click

 Tongue pizzicato with a little tone

Duration

ca. 9 minutes

Composed for Michael Gordon

A Long Weight of Silence

AJ Harbison (2021)

i. intro

Rubato ♩ ≈ 52



gradually increase air gradually decrease air

Flute 1

p *fp* *p* *n.* — *mp*

Flute 2

fp *p* *fp < f* — *n.*

6

n. *p* bend 3

n. — *mp* *n.*

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9

mp — *p* *p* *n.* bend

fp *p*

12

3 11 *mf* — *mp* — *mf*

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14 *mf* *Shostakovich Sym. No. 5* *mp*

16 *mp* *accel.* *Stravinsky Pétouchka* *f* *mp* *p*

18 *ff* *ii. silence* *p* *mp*

22 *pp* *p* *n.* *mp* *pp*

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Musical score for measures 28-32. The score is written for two staves in treble clef. Measure 28 starts with a *mp* dynamic. Measures 29-30 feature a *pp* dynamic with a series of notes marked with a plus sign (+). Measure 31 has a *p* dynamic. Measure 32 is marked with a fermata and a *n.* (ritardando) marking. The bottom staff has a *p* dynamic in measure 29, a *n.* marking in measure 30, a *p* dynamic in measure 31, and a *pp* dynamic in measure 32.

Musical score for measures 33-37. Measure 33 starts with a *mp* dynamic. Measure 34 has a *p* dynamic. A box in measure 35 says "Turn to face Flute 1". Measure 36 has a *mf* dynamic and is marked "Stravinsky Pétrouchka". Measure 37 has a *mf* dynamic. The bottom staff has a *mp* dynamic in measure 34.

Musical score for measures 38-39. Measure 38 starts with a *mf* dynamic and is marked "Turn to face Flute 2". A large watermark "PERUSAL SCORE ONLY" is overlaid across the score. Measure 39 has a *mf* dynamic. The bottom staff has a *mf* dynamic in measure 38 and a *mf* dynamic in measure 39.

Musical score for measures 40-43. Measure 40 starts with a *mp* dynamic. Measure 41 has a *mp* dynamic. Measure 42 has a *mf* dynamic. Measure 43 has a *mp* dynamic. A box in measure 42 says "Take a step back". The bottom staff has a *mp* dynamic in measure 40 and a *p* dynamic in measure 41.

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43

step back

pointedly, detached

Take a step back

mf 6

3 3

mp

Take a step back

tr^h

Take a step back

mp *mf* *mp*

iv. anger

♩ = 76

46

Turn away from Flute 2

p

pp

f

detached

non dim.

Turn away from Flute 1

tr^h

detached

non dim.

Take a step back

p *pp* *f*

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50

fp

f

mp

Brahms Sym. No. 1

Brahms Sym. No. 1

54

f

mp

f

mf

mp

mp

f

mf

mp

3

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58

f *mp*

6

61

increase air

lightly

Turn to face audience

p *pp* *p*

6 3 3

65

fp *mf* *p* *f*

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p *f*

6 7 7

v. bargaining

68

Turn to face Flute 2

Turn away

Throw notes at Flute 1

Turn away

Turn to face Flute 1

fp *mf*

6 6 3

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(tr) ~~~~~

at Flute 2 away

Turn to face Flute 2

Turn away

71

mp *p* *mp* *p*

p *f* *mp*

Turn to face Flute 2

Turn to face Flute 1

74

mp *mf* *p*

mf *p*

Throw notes at Flute 2

Turn away

78

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f

p *mf* *f*

vi. depression
 Rubato; slightly faster than Tempo I ♩ = 58

Sit down

Sit down

80

p *p* *3*

p *mp* *fp*

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84

not harshly

11

mf

mp *pp*

fp

pp *p*

87

n.

mp

p

p

mp *p*

3 *mfp*

mfp

gradually decrease air

91

3 *mp*

p *pp*

p

p

pp *fp* *mp* *p*

increase air

95

gradually decrease air

Stand

n.

Stand

n.

vii. acceptance

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98 Slightly faster ♩ ≈ 66

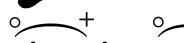
Musical score for measures 98-101. The score is written for two staves in treble clef. The time signature changes from 4/4 to 6/4, then 5/4, and finally 3/4. Dynamics include *mp* and *p*. There are crescendo and decrescendo hairpins. The music features melodic lines with slurs and accents.

Musical score for measures 102-104. The score is written for two staves in treble clef. The time signature changes from 3/4 to 5/4, then 4/4, and finally 5/4. Dynamics include *mp*, *mf*, and *pp*. The word "lightly" is written above the second staff. The music features melodic lines with slurs and accents.

Musical score for measures 105-106. The score is written for two staves in treble clef. The time signature changes from 4/4 to 6/4, and finally 4/4. Dynamics include *mp* and *p*. The music features melodic lines with slurs and accents. A large watermark "PERUSAL SCORE ONLY" is overlaid on the score.

Musical score for measures 107-110. The score is written for two staves in treble clef. The time signature changes from 4/4 to 6/4, then 5/4, and finally 4/4. Dynamics include *mp* and *mf*. The music features melodic lines with slurs and accents. There are trills and triplets indicated.

Turn to face Flute 2



Turn to face Flute 1

viii meaning

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111 Slightly faster but unhurried $\text{♩} \approx 84$

Take step toward Flute 2

116

Take step toward Flute 2

121

Take step toward Flute 2

gradually increase air

126

Take step toward Flute 2