

Concerto for Piano & Orchestra

Commissioned by the United Kingdom Embassy of the Republic of Croatia

I Adagio Drammatico – Allegro Vivo

II Adagio – Andante – Tempo Primo -

III Allegro Vivo – Andante – Adagio – Affrettando - Fugato

In late 2009 I acquired a Bechstein grand piano, owned for seventy years by a remarkable retired physician, musician and painter, Dr John Horder CBE, who was keen for the instrument to go to a fellow musician. Shortly after, I met the talented German-Croatian pianist, Diana Brekalo, and after hearing her perform a concerto in London, she asked if I might like to write one myself. With the support of the Croatian Embassy, I was able to start work with a very particular focus, including my love of the great piano concerto repertoire of the past and the lyrical tone of a certain late nineteenth-century Bechstein. What I found myself composing was music of considerable resoluteness and emotional intensity, and the score is prefaced with the following lines by Omar Khayyám (1048-1131), as translated by Edward FitzGerald:

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.
And that inverted Bowl we call The Sky,
Whereunder crawling coop't we live and die,
Lift not thy hands to It for help - for It
Rolls impotently on as Thou or I.

The first movement is the most substantial, beginning with a Db pedal in low strings and a short lachrymose viola melody from which the whole movement is derived. This develops into a slow fugal introduction until the music manages to break free in a forceful allegro version of the theme. The slow middle movement opens with a plangent oboe melody, then taken up by the piano. An expressive and more contrapuntal Andante section prefaces a return to the opening melody, but this time incorporating ingredients of the middle section, particularly a pithy and quietly insistent trumpet fanfare. The Finale follows the slow movement without a break and opens with strident piano gestures. The material eventually takes a more lyrical and fluid guise marked Andante, before a ghost-like remembrance of the motto-theme of the first movement wistfully leads us back to a more unstable version of the opening material, culminating in a seemingly unstoppable fugue. A climax precedes an almost mocking string pizzicato version of the main theme, overlaid with the motto theme in flute and horn, before the music cascades to an inevitable and powerful conclusion.