

Piano Concerto

Peter Fischer 2019

Notes—

The movements are subtitled as follows:

- I ... *I am the pool of blue...*
- II ... *peace flows into me...*
- III ... *give me your stars to hold...*

The phrases are from the Sara Teasdale poem, *Peace*. The middle movement is based entirely on my choral work of the same title, though with much more development and virtuosic writing. The other two movements derive from the sense of deep color, mystery, and emotion of the text. In particular, the images of water, sky, sunset, and stars are all distilled with sublime and ultimate succinctness in these short beautiful stanzas. The music attempts to convey this power and universality.

Peace

Peace flows into me
As the tide to the pool by the shore;
It is mine forevermore,
It ebbs not back like the sea.

I am the pool of blue
That worships the vivid sky;
My hopes were heaven-high,
They are all fulfilled in you.

I am the pool of gold
When sunset burns and dies—
You are my deepening skies,
Give me your stars to hold.

Sara Teasdale

I. Two themes are introduced early in the movement—the first is in the introductory solo piano leading right into the second at the Allegro. The second theme is in two clear parts which are differentiated by the change of dynamics from loud to soft half way through the section. Development begins after a short transition and features the first of many arpeggios in seconds. These arpeggios are of three kinds—pentatonic, whole-tone, and a hybrid dissonance using the minor seconds on the adjacent keys B-C and E-F. The opening theme makes a triumphal orchestral return leading into a colorful series of contrapuntal thematic entrances against a fantasy-like piano. The following section is machine-like in its orchestral underpinning with fragments of themes developed in clear orchestral sectional writing with the piano echoing the themes at the top of dramatic arpeggiation figures. A recapitulation follows with the solo piano bringing back the initial first theme, this time against pentatonic arpeggios. The second theme is brought back in subtle fashion—almost as a transitory move, before a dramatic concluding section, again featuring the arpeggios in seconds.

II. *Scorrevole* means flowing, and like the idea of peace itself, the flow is ineluctable and elusive, deepening in intensity through the entire movement. The text from the original choral work begins in measure 9 with “Peace flows into me” repeated in measure 11 in the viola, cello, and horn—the piano line is a countermelody. “As the tide to the pool by the shore” is in measures 13-14, with “It is mine” repeated in mm. 15 and 16. Measures 17-19 use “forevermore” thrice leading to the last line of the stanza “It ebbs not back like the sea” in mm. 20-21. “Peace flows into me” is presented once more in mm. 22-24 to conclude the melodic theme. The stanzas for “I am the pool of blue...” and “I am the pool of gold...” are encompassed in the next section marked *Tranquillaménte scorrevole* with the piano coloring the string melody in simple repetitive right-hand arpeggiations followed by more complex quintuplets in flowing passagework and arpeggiations. A woodwind accompanied solo passage repeats the first stanza followed by a variation of the “pool of blue” melody that is interrupted by a dramatic fast-tempo cadenza-like passage, though with orchestral accompaniment. This all leads to a repetition of the opening stanza, this time with virtuosic piano reinforcement. A coda follows in similar fashion to the choral work where the word “peace” is repeated—now in the strings, but with motives and themes re-appearing in various voices of the orchestra—all dying away as the orchestra and piano find peace with each other. The original “peace” melody finds two last repetitions in solo violin and solo cello as the movement concludes and the piano holds onto the last sonority until the sound has all but died away.

III. The third movement is a simple modified sonata form [ABCAB] with an opening energetic rhythmic theme and contrasting strikingly rhythmic accompaniment in the orchestra. The theme feels dark and dissonant, and yet is also strongly emotional in its rising motivic development. The B section is completely contrasting in its harmonic content, bringing a much more pan-diatonic feel with a hypnotically syncopated chordal theme. The middle section (C) brings a respite from the energy of the first two sections, and a needed lyrical melody presented by the full orchestra. The melody is then repeated in a lighter orchestration with the piano solo emphasizing the melody with rich and colorful complex rhythmic passagework where ligatures are ever changing in irregular note patterns, especially as the melody uses an unfolding of syncopated rhythms—all giving the hint of impressionistically modern chromaticism. As the C-section fades away, the music returns suddenly to the opening A-section, extended this time into a more virtuosic world of variational motives. The return of the B-section is disguised somewhat in its dual role as a coda. Arpeggios in seconds return from the first movement, including a new combination of the original whole-tone/pentatonic. Repeated sections of the coda with new colors and variations drive the movement to a dramatic close.

Premiere Performance
Mei-Hsuan Huang, piano
Philip Mann, conductor
Texas Tech University Symphony Orchestra
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P. Fischer