

WITH SUNSHINE IN HIS FACE

This solo aims to bridge the gap between two poles in percussion literature – particularly advanced pieces with little accessibility, and elementary pieces that revolve around exercising certain techniques, with what seems to be little regard for the music involved. *With Sunshine in His Face*, is meant to capture death’s grief and the coping that accompanies it, while addressing very important marimba techniques.

The title *With Sunshine in His Face* holds a threefold significance – all of which are related to my late father-in-law, Mr. David Kesler. This song was going through my head the morning that I watched Dave pass away and through others’ the day I had the honor of playing it at his funeral.

It was a cloudy spring morning at his home the day that he finally passed away from a five-year battle against all kinds of cancer. Everyone in the room somehow knew that he had taken his last breath. Things were all of a sudden very calm, and as if it were a scene in a movie, the clouds in the sky gave way to sunshine that flooded the room and radiated his now peaceful face. Then, his golden retriever by the name of Sunshine gently muzzled his face.

A funny thing about Dave, though, is that from the six years that I was fortunate enough to know him, I don’t always remember the rough parts of his five years of inhuman suffering. In fact, I am blessed to remember a strong man whose very countenance brought peace to everyone he met. He was the epic gentle giant that knew volumes, but spoke few words. A testament to how so many could stand to live their lives. He was at peace with so much, and as a result, was able to truly live life with sunshine in his face.

A music analyst might call this piece a theme and variations or maybe a fantasy for marimba. I prefer to think of this more like a tone poem about the grieving process, of course, with a peaceful resolution. “Sunshine...” incorporates many issues concerning four-mallet technique and seeks to blend them into a flowing performance of beauty, not simply an exercise.

“In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength.” Dave’s memory lives with myself and others, and always will. Coming to grips with death means that one can truly live, enjoying silence, clouds, love, rain, all that good stuff – including sunshine in all of our faces.

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