

ELEGY for Piano (1986)

Donald M. Wilson

Program Note

Reminiscent of some of the pieces in “The Book of Sounds” for piano by Hans Otte, ELEGY is a minimalistic study involving pure triads over an ostinato. Limited to half-notes in 2/4 time, the bass line is comprised of descending fourths (or rising fifths) that range between middle C and the lowest C on the piano. Each bass note is the root of a major or minor triad. Throughout the work, only seven triads are heard (C G d a e b F), always in the same sequence. Because diminished triads are excluded, there is an ear-catching cross relation that occurs every seventh measure between the fifth of the b-minor triad (F#) and the root of the F-major triad.

Overall, ELEGY belongs to the tradition of “variations on a ground.” It initially wanted to be a study in gradually thinning textures, from eighth-note activity to half-note, but then it refused to suggest an ending for itself and consequently got set aside. Shock and grief over the tragic death of one of my best students in the graduate analysis course (she was the wife of a colleague of mine on the BGSU composition faculty) caused me to find the proper conclusion, one with possibly spiritual implications. ELEGY is dedicated to the memory of Linda DePue.

When 36 years later her son Alex (known internationally as “The Fiddler”) died unexpectedly, I was inspired to add a violin part to the ELEGY and transform it into a violin-piano duo. Finally, an accompaniment involving many more strings presented itself and led me to score the final version for two violins, piano and string orchestra.

Yet gone to the tomb