

HOW CAN YOU OWN THE SKY?

A Symphonic Poem Honoring Native Wisdom

Notes from the composer

How Can You Own The Sky? is a journey in four stages, from the legend of creation, through the trials of the first peoples of Southern Oregon, into the devastation of the Rogue River Wars, and finally toward a more hopeful future of peaceful reconciliation, healing of past wrongs, and a return to Native American teachings of greater harmony with our world and all its inhabitants.

Those who are familiar with traditional symphonic structures will recognize a first movement with an introduction and two principal themes, a second movement that's reminiscent of a scherzo, a slow movement that plumbs the depths, and a final movement that ties everything together. But these old forms are given new life as the orchestra takes on the role of the storyteller, forming a dialogue with the narrated poetry and giving voice to ancient wisdom and longstanding suffering.

The performance begins with the Dancing Spirit ensemble singing an original melody composed (or as he likes to say, "caught") by Brent Florendo. This melody, which we could call "The Song of the Heart," is the through-line and essence of the entire piece.

Next, Brent transitions to the role of the Narrator, and he gives us the first piece of Tiziana's poetry, *Part One: The Sacred Hoop Is Created*, the story of how our world came to be. The orchestra then enters with a first movement that follows the poetry closely. Listen for the fluttering of dragonfly wings, representing the ancestors of the Takelma Tribe, followed by the appearance of the two principal "characters," the solo violin in the role of The Giver, and the English horn in the role of The Beloved. The Song of the Heart, like the newly-created world itself, is nascent, unfolding, not yet fully formed, as we hear aspects of it refracted throughout the first movement.

Part Two: The Sacred Hoop Is Preserved continues to explore the legends of the Takelma people, now focusing on how they came into harmony with the foundational landmarks of the

Rogue Valley. As told first by the Narrator and then enacted by the orchestra, the first people of the Valley struggle to maintain their connection with the Creator, losing their way several times before finally learning crucial lessons about moderation, devotion, and respect for the gifts of the land. In this colorful story, these human themes of loss and redemption are played out through the mythic characters of the Daldal Brothers, the trickster Old Goyl, and Chicken Hawk. When the people have finally returned to harmony with each other and their surroundings, The Song of the Heart is presented as an English Horn solo, the first time we hear it fully formed in the orchestra.

Part Three: The Sacred Hoop Is Broken steps from mythic time into recent history, recounting the nightmares of the Rogue River Wars of the 1850's and the Removal, which saw the Takelma, Shasta, and Athapascan people killed in large numbers and forced along Oregon's own Trail of Tears to the Siletz Reservation near present-day Lincoln City. Here we hear the footsteps of this agonizing forced migration in the form of a *passacaglia*, a musical procedure in which a repeating bassline is maintained and passed around through all sections of the orchestra. In this third movement, all overt signs of the Song of the Heart, and indeed of hope itself, appear to be lost.

Part Four: The Sacred Hoop Is Restored takes us to our present moment. Out of the ashes of seeming annihilation, The Giver returns in the guise of the solo violin, awakening and rekindling each instrument of the orchestra in turn. In the first portion of this movement, listen for a powerful repeating motive in the solo violin that causes each member of the orchestra to arise from paralyzing despair and take part in a new declamation of hope and longing. Once the orchestra has been reawakened, the solo violin goes about "teaching" them the Song of the Heart, and as each section takes up the Song and the orchestra is joined again by Dancing Spirit, the Song of the Heart links the past with the present and points the way toward a renewal of the First Nations spirit and a new dawn of reconciliation between all the peoples of Oregon and beyond.