

**Garth Knox: « Stranger » for viola and viola d'amore (2014)**

Program Notes:

The starting point for this piece is an old Irish tune called « The Wounded Hussar » thought to have been composed by blind Irish harper Turlough O'Carolan (1670 - 1738) for his friend Captain O'Kane:

*« the hero of a hundred fights from Landon to Oudenarde, who, when old and war-worn, tottered back from the Low Countries to his birthplace to die, and found himself not only a stranger, but an outlawed, disinherited, homeless wanderer in the ancient territories that his fathers ruled as Lords of Limavady. »*

The bitterness and anger which accompany this eighteenth century equivalent of a post-Vietnam experience are already present to some degree in the melody. My idea was to draw these out, and to portray a world that is falling apart, gently and without drama. Following the opening exposition of the tune, there are many attempts to recapture the melody, but each time there are more parts missing or transformed and little by little a feeling of « strangeness » becomes more and more persistent, filling the absences of an Alzheimer-like memory loss.

The sympathetic strings of the viola d'amore, which prolong the resonances of the playing strings are in themselves a kind of memory, albeit a very selective one. As the piece progresses, they become more present, and are even played directly both plucked and with the bow (normally they are left to resonate passively). At the end of the piece, these sympathetic strings are left holding the last partial memories of what once had been.

« Stranger » is commissioned by and dedicated to Melia Watras, to whom I am grateful for her encouragement, her enthusiastic collaboration and her beautiful playing.

--Garth Knox