

William Hill (1954 –)
Aurora Borealis

Written: 2005

Movements: One

Style: Contemporary

Duration: 20 minutes approx.

William Hill has been critically acclaimed as a composer, soloist, visual artist, recording artist, and conductor. Currently, he is Principal Timpanist with the Colorado Symphony and the Grand Teton Music Festival where he has also served as resident composer. A multi-instrumentalist, he has been featured with numerous orchestras as a soloist on timpani, marimba, vibraphone, drum set, ethnic percussion, and multiple percussion concertos. Hill's compositions range from symphonic, to chamber music, modern jazz, and ethnic influenced music. William Hill provides the following notes about his Aurora Borealis: Aurora Borealis is very much a tone poem in the genre of the works of Richard Strauss and Claude Debussy. Bits of the almost minimalist techniques of Jean Sibelius are also recognizable. An impressionistic musical language is used to depict the icy monochromatic stillness of the far north, with gradual hints of color developing into more subtle shadows of the spectrum as the piece evolves. An almost organic growth of material, from the first isolated harmonics in strings and single tones of the flute, takes the music through very slow changes of harmony, melody, and tone color.

The work was written for and dedicated to James Pellerite, and is specifically designed to give him a framework within which he can improvise the many haunting effects and colors that he so beautifully produces on the Native flutes. While there is no specific story line it is hoped that the listeners will simply absorb the orchestral colors and use their own imaginations to feel the magic of these 'Dancing Lights' and the sense of wonder they have created in people since the dawn of time.

My favorite Eskimo legend says the Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis) are torches held by Spirits leading the souls of those recently deceased over the abyss at the edge of the world. A narrow pathway leads the spirit souls across the abyss to a place of beauty and peace, where there is no pain or suffering. Only the Spirits and the Raven may go to this place. The Spirits communicate with Earth people through these magic lights, and in a whistling whisper of sound, and the living may only answer in a whispering singing tone. The lights and sounds allow those still among the living to communicate in this way with their ancient ancestors."

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