Threnody 1 for Strings (op 37) ('Rage, rage against the dying of the light', as the piece was originally titled) is dedicated to the memory of a young boy -Bernard Fortuin- who was shot and killed in May 1980 at a time of political unrest in Cape Town.

The work, which is programmatic, commences with a chord of death, symbolizing the killing of the boy. The boy's own theme is never stated, but may be imagined in the silent bars of mourning that occur at the beginning and end of the piece. The 12-note pleading theme of his mother, introduced on first violins and violas, provides the main thematic material of the work. The ever-present programme - dissent and violent reaction, funeral laments, tolling bells, the devil tuning his violin - is left to the listener's imagination.

The work is scored in thirteen parts. The number of strings may be increased proportionately with appropriate balance adjustments where necessary.

Threnody 1 has a close connection with the University of Natal, because it was to have been premiered there in late 1981. Tragically the conductor, Gerry La Pierre, was killed in motorbike accident shortly before the concert. Because of its political content it was first performed as late as 1992 -by Eric Rycroft and the Stellenbosch String Ensemble. Its South African performances have included a live television one (1993), featuring the former National Symphony Orchestra of the SABC.

Threnody 1 heralded a short series of orchestral works that were the composer's response to the situation that prevailed in South Africa at the time. These works included 'Requiem for Orchestra' and Violin Concerto (both BBC premieres).

J.S.

8.12.21

'RAGE, RAGE AGAINST THE DYING OF THE LIGHT'

for string orchestra (1980) opus 37

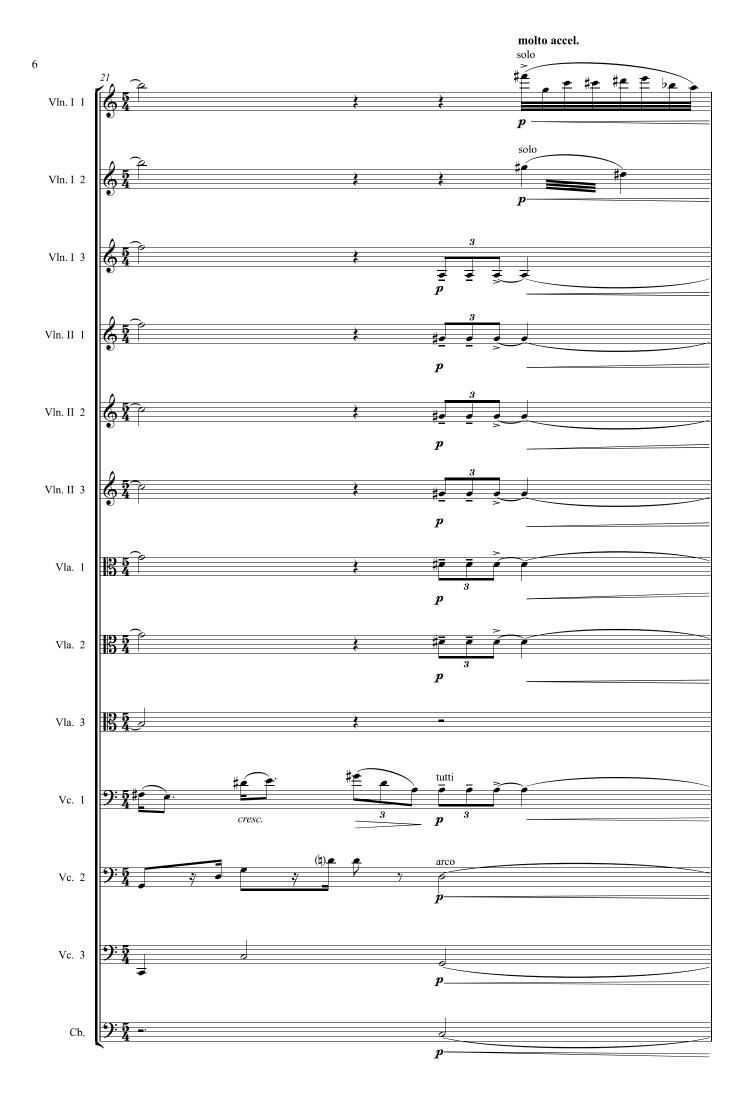


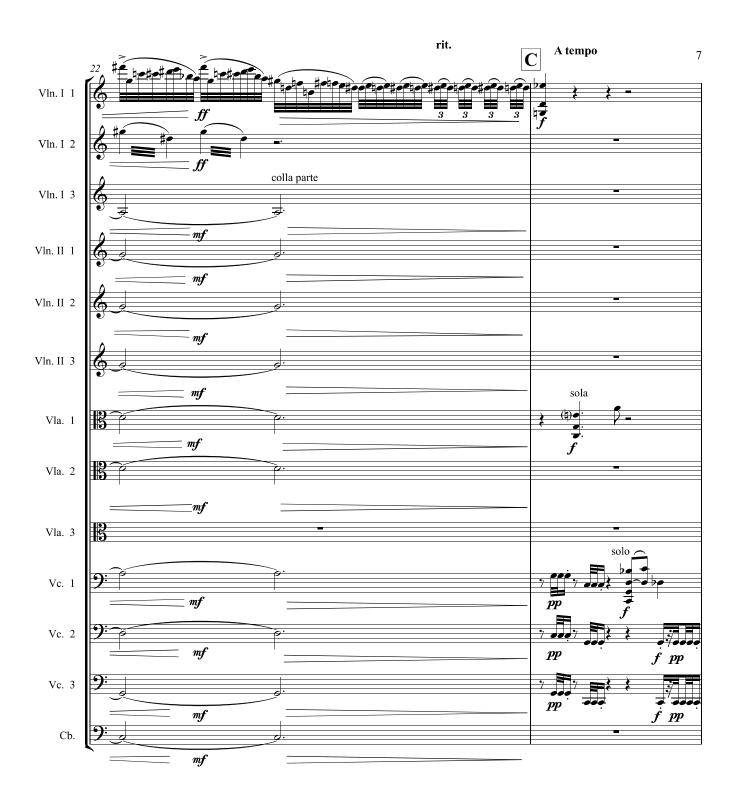














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