

Program Notes for VSO Concert – Ravel Piano Concerti (G Major and Left Hand) and Ravel Mother Goose and Benjamin Concerto for Orchestra – November 14-15, 2025

By Jonathan Berkowitz

MAURICE RAVEL (1875 to 1937)

Joseph-Maurice Ravel was born in 1875 in the French Basque town of Ciboure to a Swiss father and Basque mother. The family was artistic and cultivated. In later life, Ravel recalled, "Throughout my childhood I was sensitive to music. My father, much better educated in this art than most amateurs are, knew how to develop my taste and to stimulate my enthusiasm at an early age." From his mother he learned a love of Spanish folk rhythms and song.

Soon after Maurice's birth, the family moved to Paris where his musical talent quickly became evident, and he began piano lessons. He wasn't a child prodigy but had a natural conception of music. At age 14, Ravel entered the Paris Conservatoire, where he studied piano, composition, and counterpoint. Ravel spent nearly 16 years connected to the Conservatoire; but his unusually long time there was punctuated by expulsions and reinstatements. He was never a brilliant pianist; he wanted to be a composer.

His teachers included Gabriel Fauré, whose refinement and harmonic subtlety deeply influenced him. Ravel was not a star student—his perfectionism and independence sometimes frustrated his professors—but he was already forging a unique artistic voice. There he produced a series of early masterpieces that revealed his meticulous technique and vivid imagination. Among them are *Pavane pour une infante défunte* and *Sonatine*, both for piano, the *String Quartet*, and *Jeux d'eau*. While other composers were exploring stormy emotions Ravel preferred restraint. He once said, "My ambition is to write music that is perfectly constructed and emotionally sincere." These early works show the astonishing perfection of style and craftsmanship that are the hallmarks of Ravel's entire oeuvre. He is one of the rare composers whose first works seem as mature as those of his later years.

Ravel's time at the Conservatoire ended in controversy. He repeatedly entered the Prix de Rome competition, France's most prestigious composition prize, but never won. The works he submitted were considered too "advanced" by ultraconservative members of the jury. By 1905, after several attempts, the jury's refusal to award him even a finalist position caused a public scandal. The resulting outcry forced the director of the Conservatoire to resign and cemented Ravel's reputation as both victim and hero of artistic integrity. The directorship of the Conservatoire was taken by Gabriel Fauré. Ravel was not by inclination a teacher, but gave lessons to a few young musicians he felt could benefit from them. Like his teacher, Fauré, he was concerned that his pupils should find their own unique voices and not be excessively influenced by established masters.

Ravel's life was largely uneventful. He never married, but enjoyed the company of friends. Finding city life fatiguing, Ravel moved to the countryside where he lived for the rest of his life. His personal life remains a mystery. Ravel served as a truck driver in World War I, despite being in his forties. The experience left him shaken and physically exhausted. The war's aftermath, combined with the death of his mother and many friends, deepened the introspective tone of his later music.

In the 1920s, Ravel toured internationally, including a four-month tour of Canada and the United States in 1928, where he met George Gershwin. Audiences were enthusiastic and the critics complimentary; but Ravel was unmoved by his new international celebrity. He commented that the critics' recent enthusiasm was of no more importance than their earlier negative judgment. However, he was fascinated by the dynamism of American life, its huge cities, skyscrapers, and advanced technology, and was impressed by its jazz, Negro spirituals, and the excellence of American orchestras.

One of his major works from the 1920s was the orchestral arrangement of Mussorgsky's piano suite *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Another was *Boléro*, which became a global sensation much to Ravel's bemusement. He insisted that it was "one long crescendo, and absolutely nothing else." He commented, "I've written only one masterpiece – *Boléro*. Unfortunately, there's no music in it."

Ravel's final years were cruel, for he began to gradually lose his memory and some of his coordination, a condition he was quite aware of it. He began to show symptoms of aphasia perhaps as a result of a car accident in 1932. Although no longer able to write music or perform, Ravel remained physically and socially active until his last months. His intellect and hearing remained sharp, and he could still hear music in his head. In 1937, surgeons attempted a risky brain operation but Ravel never regained consciousness and died in Paris in December 1937 at the age of 62. He was buried in a Paris suburb where he had lived.

Ravel and Claude Debussy's music is often called "Impressionist," a label Ravel disliked. The term, borrowed from painting, refers to a style that emphasizes atmosphere, colour, and suggestion rather than structure or narrative. Like the brushstrokes of Monet, musical Impressionism relies on shimmering harmonies, ambiguous tonality, and delicate textures to evoke moods rather than tell stories. Ravel shared some of these qualities, but his approach was more structured and precise than Debussy's. Whereas Debussy aimed to dissolve boundaries, Ravel sought balance and proportion. Debussy was the poet of blurred edges, Ravel the craftsman of crystalline design.

The two composers' careers intertwined for decades. They moved in similar circles and were influenced by Symbolist poetry, exoticism, and non-Western music. They admired each other's work but were often set up as rivals by critics and the Parisian press. In truth, their relationship was respectful but cautious, a mixture of mutual admiration, artistic difference, and occasional tension. When asked about their supposed rivalry, Ravel remarked, "If there were no Debussy, there would be no Ravel." It was both an acknowledgment and a gentle deflection.

Ravel's output was not large. Famously meticulous, he destroyed works he found unsatisfactory. But nearly everything he published is considered a gem. His orchestral palette was revolutionary in its clarity and colour. He once said, "The art of orchestration is the art of transparent illusion." He was not a revolutionary musician, yet he adapted the traditional musical idiom into a language unmistakably his own. Igor Stravinsky compared Ravel to "the most perfect of Swiss watchmakers."

Among his works to enter the repertoire are pieces for piano, chamber music, two piano concertos, ballet music, two operas and eight song cycles; he wrote no symphonies or church music. Many of his works exist in two versions: first, a piano score and later an orchestration. Some of his piano music is exceptionally difficult to play, and his complex orchestral works require skillful balance in performance.

Maurice Ravel was a man of paradoxes—precise yet passionate, modern yet classical, French yet cosmopolitan. He once said, “The only love affair I have ever had was with music.” His exquisitely crafted music, perfectly balanced between intellect and beauty, remain among the most beloved and enduring creations of the twentieth century.

Piano Concerto in G major – Ravel (1931)

Orchestration: *piccolo, flute, oboe, English horn, E-flat clarinet, clarinet, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, trumpet, trombone, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, slapstick, tam-tam, triangle, and wood block), harp, strings, and solo piano*

Ravel’s *Piano Concerto in G major* sparkles like champagne. It is witty, urbane, rhythmically alive, and brimming with colour. Written after his triumphant American tour, it is one of Ravel’s final completed works and is a perfect reflection of his elegance and precision.

Ravel had long admired the Classical balance of Mozart and Saint-Saëns, and conceived the Concerto in that spirit: not as a grand statement of struggle and triumph, but as an *entertainment*—virtuosic yet playful, graceful yet emotionally direct. “It should be lighthearted and brilliant,” he wrote, “in the spirit of Mozart and Saint-Saëns.” Among its other influences are jazz and Basque folk music. The work reflects the fast-moving, turbulent life Ravel experienced in North America.

When first meeting, Gershwin asked Ravel to give him composition lessons. Ravel politely declined, saying “You would only lose the spontaneous quality of your melody and end by writing bad Ravel.” In fact, the first movement of Ravel’s Concerto can be thought of in many ways as a remarkable sequel to Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* and his *Concerto in F Major*.

The Concerto was composed simultaneously with his *Concerto for the Left Hand*; see the notes following. While that work is dark and monumental, this one is bright, cosmopolitan, and full of joy. Ravel intended to premiere it himself, but declining health forced him to yield the solo part to Marguerite Long, who played it at the 1932 premiere in Paris under Ravel’s baton.

The first movement—***Allegramente***—explodes with a whip crack and burst of energy that announce the work as one of vitality and wit. The influence of American jazz and blues are unmistakable, from the syncopated rhythms to the exuberant swing that infuse the music. A theme tossed between winds, piano, and strings is Ravel’s precise reimagining of jazz. The music remains elegant, transparent, and unmistakably French. Amid the sparkle are moments of dreamlike calm—harps, flutes, and soft piano cascades. Listen closely and you may be able to identify five distinct themes in the exposition. The development is a lively romp followed by a cadenza-like passage that leads to the recapitulation. Ravel did not just write one cadenza, he wrote three: for harp, woodwind, and then piano. The piano cadenza is based on the fifth theme of the exposition. A rollicking coda, with the piano and orchestra chasing each other, brings the movement to an end.

The second movement—***Adagio assai***—is the emotional heart of the Concerto, and one of the most exquisitely beautiful slow movements ever written. Ravel once said that the inspiration came to him “as if dictated by Mozart.” It has the poise and grace of a Classical slow movement filtered through Ravel’s harmonic sophistication. Compositionally, it was one of the most difficult pieces

Ravel ever wrote. He said, "That flowing phrase! How I worked over it bar by bar! It nearly killed me!" He later remarked that he composed it two measures at a time, using the theme from the *Larghetto* of Mozart's *Clarinet Quintet* for inspiration. Ravel built a 34-bar melody without repeating a single bar. That melody seems to float on air; long phrases that expand naturally, like the slow breathing of someone at peace. It is astonishing that bar by bar writing produced three minutes of seamless continuity.

The solo flute now enters, and, with the oboe and clarinet and then the strings, carry the melody into the second theme, with the piano in an accompanying role. A slightly dissonant passage follows, with the orchestra playing slow ascending chord progressions while the piano part provides the harmonies. The English horn brings back the opening theme underneath the piano's delicate ornamentation in the upper register. The tune passes through the orchestra, ending up in the strings and piano, which briefly restate the first theme. The harmonies drift through unexpected keys, evoking a sense of nostalgia rather than sadness. The piano ends with a prolonged trill, and the movement closes in utter stillness.

Without pause, the finale—**Presto**—bursts in with a mischievous snap. It's a high-speed *perpetuum mobile*, full of dazzling runs, sudden accents, and playful rhythmic tricks. Ravel's humour is on full display: the music zips between keys, punctuated by brass fanfares and sparkling woodwinds. Here the jazz energy returns, but now in a whirlwind of brilliance and irony, as if the Paris of the 1930s had come alive in music. Edward Downes commented about the rapid four-minute conclusion that it "flies at such supersonic speed that it seems to finish before it has started."

The solo part begins with a series of 32nd notes (demisemiquavers) which are to be played *piano*, a technically demanding combination. The movement makes its way through various forms and then ends abruptly and cheekily, with the same four chords with which the movement begins. It is a burst of energy and a quick wink of sound, a final reminder that, for all its elegance, this is a work of joy and mischief. The finale features a virtuosic race between the piano and orchestra. Who wins? The listener does!

The *Piano Concerto in G major* embodies everything that makes Ravel unique: technical perfection, liveliness, colour, and an elegant balance of Classical form and modern flair. In its three movements, Ravel gives us an entire world: the rhythmic energy of the city, the still beauty of the soul, and the exuberant play of a musical imagination unmatched in its refinement.

Piano Concerto for the Left Hand in D major – Ravel (1929–30)

Orchestration: 3 flutes (3rd = piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, tam-tam, triangle, wood block), harp, strings, and solo piano

Ravel's *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand* is among the most extraordinary works in the piano repertoire—a masterpiece born of tragedy, triumph, and ingenuity. It was commissioned by Paul Wittgenstein, an Austrian pianist who lost his right arm in World War I. Wittgenstein, a member of one of the wealthiest and most distinguished families in Europe, was determined to continue his career; he commissioned several composers including Ravel, Prokofiev, Britten, and Hindemith to

write works for left hand alone. Ravel accepted the commission in 1929, shortly after completing his successful tour of the United States, where he had been captivated by American jazz. He was intrigued by the challenge of composing a piano concerto for only one hand. He explained, “The fear of difficulty, however, is never as keen as the pleasure of contending with it, and, if possible, of overcoming it.”

Ravel was a master at creating brilliant solo piano works, but had never before tackled a piano concerto. At the age of 55 at the height of his fame and powers, he found himself writing two of them. The commission by Wittgenstein was the catalyst for him to compose the *Concerto in G*. The resulting *Concerto for the Left Hand* is anything but a compromise. It is a full-scale symphonic drama compressed into a single movement—dark, monumental, and astonishingly complete in texture despite the limitation of one hand.

When Wittgenstein first saw the score, he was startled: the piano part was so intricate and massive that he thought it unplayable. He later came to admire it, though Ravel was reportedly displeased when the pianist initially altered some passages in performance. Still, the work quickly became recognized as one of Ravel’s greatest achievements, not as a curiosity, but as a profound statement on struggle and transformation.

The *Concerto for the Left Hand*’s single continuous movement unfolds into clearly defined sections that correspond to traditional concerto form: a slow introduction, a fast and turbulent main section, a lyrical interlude, and a virtuosic coda. The orchestration is massive, dark, and richly layered, a striking contrast to Ravel’s sparkling *Concerto in G major*.

The **Introduction** begins with an almost inaudible low double bass solo, written on the four open strings. This creates the illusion that the orchestra is still tuning up. The basses are soon joined by the contrabassoon and bassoons. This opening feels like an awakening from darkness, a deep and primordial soundscape. Gradually, the orchestra expands upward through the registers, building tension in a long, continuous crescendo to a climax that announces the entrance of the piano.

The piano’s first appearance is striking: a rising arpeggio that seems to emerge from the same abyss. The principal themes are set out with force and drama. Even with one hand, Ravel writes in multiple layers: he uses the resonance of the pedal and wide leaps to create the illusion of two hands, melody and accompaniment simultaneously. After the orchestra responds with its own version of the melody, another piano solo then introduces a beautiful, new and jazzy melody. It passes from one instrument to another while the soloist embellishes with rapid passages. The atmosphere of the introduction is somber and mysterious, foreshadowing the Concerto’s central theme: the triumph of spirit over limitation.

The music abruptly surges into a faster scherzo-like **Allegro**. The piano now dominates, darting through rapid figuration, jagged rhythms, and sharp syncopations. Here Ravel draws heavily on American jazz and blues rhythms, but filtered through his own sophisticated harmonic palette. Ravel himself described this segment as “an episode in the nature of an improvisation... introducing a kind of jazz music actually constructed on the themes of the first section.” The bold main theme alternates with more lyrical material, but the overall tone remains dark and driven. The piano writing is virtuosic to the extreme—torrents of notes, wide leaps, and dense chords, all produced with one hand. Yet the effect is not merely technical display; it feels heroic, almost

defiant. Ravel's orchestration amplifies the drama. The percussion and brass frequently engage in dialogue with the piano, creating the impression of a great struggle between soloist and orchestra.

After this fierce battle, the music suddenly subsides into a slow, dreamlike **Lento**. The piano introduces a wistful, introspective melody, accompanied by soft strings and harp. This passage is one of Ravel's most haunting inspirations, and recalls the stillness of the second movement of his G-major Concerto. The texture is transparent, the harmonies ambiguous, and time seems suspended. Yet even here, a sense of unease lingers beneath the surface. Ravel weaves a long quasi-cadenza for the piano, again showing his uncanny ability to make one hand sound like an orchestra unto itself. The writing alternates singing melodies with thunderous bass lines, sustained through ingenious use of pedal and resonance.

With the arrive of a brief **Finale** the calm breaks. Alongside blazing brass, the piano races upward in dazzling runs to the final confrontation between piano and orchestra. The work ends abruptly in a burst of power—an exultant resolution, not a gentle one. It is as if Ravel were declaring that limitation has been overcome.

The *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand* was premiered in Vienna in 1932, with Paul Wittgenstein as soloist. It was an immediate sensation. Today, the Concerto is regarded as one of Ravel's towering masterpieces, both an astonishing feat of compositional craft but also a profound artistic statement. It stands alongside the concertos of Prokofiev, Bartók, and Gershwin as a defining work of its era.

The piece is a remarkable illusion and a compelling paradox. The illusion is that it was written for one hand but sounds like two or even three are playing! The paradox is that it is a work of both constraint and liberation that affirms the human capacity to create beauty in the face of loss. In some ways the work is close in spirit to Beethoven's struggle and victory model, but expressed through Ravel's refined language. Pianists still marvel at how Ravel could create such richness from one hand. As Alfred Cortot once remarked, "Ravel has written not a concerto for one hand, but a concerto for two hands that happen to be on one arm."

Final Note: Ravel's two piano concertos, both completed in 1931, are perfect companions yet opposites. Together, they represent Ravel's final and most mature statements for piano and orchestra—a summation of his craft and his boundless imagination. It is a special treat to hear both in the same concert program.

Ma mère l'Oye (Mother Goose) – Ravel (orchestral suite, 1911)

Orchestration: 2 flutes (2nd = piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd = English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons (2nd = contrabassoon), 2 horns, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, tam-tam, triangle, xylophone), harp, celesta, and strings

Few composers captured the wonder of childhood as gracefully as Ravel. His *Ma mère l'Oye* (Mother Goose, or literally, "My Mother the Goose") is a gentle, shimmering evocation of fairy tales, a work that combines exquisite craftsmanship with disarming simplicity.

Ravel wrote the original piano duet version in 1908–10 for the young son and daughter of close friends who often hosted Ravel in their home. The children were beginner pianists, and Ravel composed the set of pieces to be simple enough for them to play, yet refined enough for the concert hall.

In 1911, Ravel orchestrated the work into a five-movement orchestral suite, revealing his genius for colour and texture. The following year, he expanded it into a full-length ballet, adding interludes and dances that link the fairy-tale scenes. Whether as duet, suite, or ballet, *Ma mère l'Oye* remains one of Ravel's most beloved works, a sound world of innocence, tenderness, and magic. The five-piece orchestral suite is the form most frequently heard today. The title refers to Charles Perrault's 1697 collection of fairy tales, *Contes de ma mère l'Oye* ("Tales of Mother Goose"), stories that included *Sleeping Beauty* and *Cinderella*. These tales were already French childhood classics by Ravel's day. The composer's fondness for such childhood fantasy and poetry is evidenced by this musical picture book.

Ravel's orchestration for the 1911 suite is a marvel of restraint and colour. Despite employing only a modest-sized orchestra, he made it sound luminous and kaleidoscopic. Notice the absence of trumpets and trombones, creating an intimate and transparent atmosphere perfectly suited to a child's dream world. Ravel's unmatched ability to adapt for orchestra music originally written for piano or other instruments is on full display here. As with most of Ravel's orchestrations of his piano scores, there is no trace of the original sound world.

I. Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant (*Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty*). The suite opens with a miniature gem, just a few dozen bars long, written as a pavane, a slow Renaissance dance that evokes the grace of a royal court. A delicate melody floats over hushed strings and harp, the pace stately and serene. *Sleeping Beauty's* enchanted slumber is portrayed with stillness, not drama. The serenity drifts gently, setting the tone for the magical world to come.

II. Petit Poucet (*Tom Thumb*). This movement tells the story of Tom Thumb who drops breadcrumbs in the forest to mark his trail, only to find that the birds have eaten them. The clarinet and flute wander through irregular rhythms, imitating the boy's uncertain footsteps. The harp and celesta trace delicate patterns, "crumbs" scattered through the forest. At times, the melody seems to lose its way, circling back on itself, a musical portrayal of Tom's confusion. Ravel's harmonic language here is quintessentially his own: transparent and tinged with quiet melancholy.

III. Laideronnette, Impératrice des Pagodes (*Laideronnette, Empress of the Pagodas*). This movement tells the politically incorrect tale of a princess cursed to be ugly (*Laideronnette* means "the little ugly one") who finds refuge in a magical Eastern kingdom populated by tiny pagodas that come to life and dance for her. Ravel's fascination with Asian music, particularly the Javanese gamelan, first heard by him at the 1889 Paris Exposition, comes to the fore here. The movement is filled with pentatonic (five-note) scales, delicate percussion, and harp glissandi that evoke bells, gongs, and exotic sonorities. The result is a musical jewel box: playful, shimmering, and rhythmically intricate. The lightness and precision foreshadow Ravel's later ballet *Daphnis et Chloé* and his operatic fantasy *L'enfant et les sortilèges*.

IV. Les entretiens de la Belle et de la Bête (*The Conversations of Beauty and the Beast*). Perhaps the most beloved of the five movements, this piece brings *Beauty and the Beast* to life

through musical dialogue. British writer Gerald Larner describes it as “Ravel’s first-ever love scene.” Each character is assigned a distinctive musical “voice.” Beauty is represented by the clarinet, graceful and tender, singing a flowing waltz melody. The Beast appears in the contrabassoon, lumbering and grotesque, answering Beauty in gruff growls. Their conversation unfolds in three stages: Beauty’s hesitant responses, the Beast’s plaintive appeals, and finally, his transformation. The music shifts into a radiant key, the Beast’s theme ascending and softening, until Beauty and her Beast waltz together in harmony. Ravel achieves all this with subtlety: no theatrical climax, just a quiet blossoming, an enchantment fulfilled.

V. Le jardin féérique (*The Fairy Garden*). This celebration of nature in *The Fairy Garden* represents *Sleeping Beauty*’s awakening. The music begins with the softest of murmurings—sustained strings, delicate harp, faint glockenspiel—as dawn rises over the enchanted garden. Gradually, the texture expands, the harmonies glow warmer, and the orchestral colours bloom. The pacing is unhurried. By the final bars, the music shines with the sound of a spell lifted and peace restored. The ending chord lingers like the last light of a fairy-tale sunset.

In *Ma mère l’Oye*, Ravel achieves the impossible: music that is simple enough for a child to play, yet profound enough for adults to treasure. His harmonic language—modal, pentatonic, and chromatic—evokes timelessness rather than modernity. Unlike Debussy’s Impressionism, which often dissolves edges and embraces ambiguity, Ravel’s fantasy world is clear, finely etched and balanced. His love of precise orchestral colour gives each movement a unique sound world: transparent strings, silvery harp, bell-like percussion, woodwinds that sing and whisper.

Ravel’s friends often remarked on his deep affection for childhood and fantasy. He once said, “When I was a child, I was sensitive to fairy tales, and later I wanted to express those feelings through music.” In *Ma mère l’Oye*, he did just that. It is a gift to children and to the child in every adult.

George Benjamin (b. 1960)

George Benjamin is an English composer, conductor, pianist, and teacher. Born in London, he began piano lessons at the age of seven and wrote his first composition at age nine. At 15, he began lessons in Paris with Olivier Messiaen, who reportedly described Benjamin as his favourite pupil. In 1980, Benjamin became the youngest living composer to have his music performed at The Proms.

Benjamin taught composition at the Royal College of Music in London, and later at King’s College London as the Henry Purcell Professor of Composition. He was also composer-in-residence with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and, in September 2025, similarly appointed with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Among his compositions are four operas. Benjamin made his operatic conducting debut in 1999 and has conducted numerous world premieres. He has received many awards including the Golden Lion Award for lifetime achievement from the Venice Biennale, the Arnold Schoenberg Prize, and the Prince Pierre of Monaco composition prize. Benjamin was knighted in 2017.

Concerto for Orchestra – George Benjamin (2021)

Orchestration: 2 flutes (one doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (one doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, percussion (including 2 crotales*, 4 timpani, suspended cymbal, 2 bongos, 2 snare drums, bass drum, tuned cowbell), strings. (* A crotale consists of small, tuned bronze or brass discs that produce a bell-like sound.)

A “concerto for orchestra” is a composition for the entire orchestra without a designated solo instrument, instead giving virtuosic and prominent roles to various individual instruments or sections throughout the piece. It is a genre that plays with the traditional concept of a concerto by using the orchestra itself as the “soloist” in a more abstract and collective way. The most famous example is the work by Béla Bartók (1943), but the first may be that of Paul Hindemith (1925).

Benjamin is best-known for his operas, but turned to purely orchestral writing with the *Concerto for Orchestra*, composed in memory of his longtime friend and fellow composer-conductor Oliver Knussen (1952–2018). It was commissioned by the Mahler Chamber Orchestra and premiered at the BBC Proms in 2021 with Benjamin conducting. Benjamin wrote about the piece, “In some ways it attempts to conjure a trace of the energy, humour, and spirit I associate with my friend and its mood is often playful, though on occasion it twists into much more turbulent terrain.”

Unlike a conventional multi-movement concerto, the work unfolds in a single 18-minute span, at a largely constant tempo, giving a sense of poised stillness. The work begins in a sustained, almost floating texture: long, suspended lines weave through the orchestra, setting an atmosphere of calm and expectation. Instead of clearly delineated movements, there are internal contrasts and shifts of character. Gradually, individual instruments come into focus: clarinets, horn pairs, a solo tuba. It is as if the orchestra is engaged in a conversation. Then a rhythmic drive emerges and the momentum builds. The strings and winds engage in rapid interplay, punctuated by the percussion. First the brass and then the full ensemble build to a powerful climax. The first violins get the penultimate word in a tranquil conclusion as the turbulence dies down.

The work received high praise at its premiere, described as music of staggering invention and a tour de force. Audiences are invited to listen to this gallery of sonic portraits and to recognize how a composer creates a memorial not just through solemnity, but through vitality, humour, and the joy of sound.