

Down A River of Time (1999)
Concerto for Oboe and Strings
by
Eric Ewazen (b. 1954)

Duration: 20

Instrumentation: String Orchestra and Solo Oboe

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- 3 Movements:
 1. . . . past hopes and dreams
 2. . . . and sorrows
 3. . . . and memories of tomorrow
- Beautiful, tonally conceived and accessible
- Requires excellent soloist
- String writing not over demanding
- The composer writes: “My father passed away on Christmas Day in 1997. On this day, the Cleveland Plain Dealer printed an article by Dick Fealger. It was a memory piece – looking back to youth, talking about loved ones and reminding the reader that time goes so quickly. In this article, Mr. Fealger described life as moving ‘down a river of time.’ These words captured my attention.
- Piano reduction version available for sale; String Orchestra version is rental
- Albany Records: Troy577 (2003) with Linda Strommen, oboe, and the International Sejong Soloists
- See web-posted article: The Double Reed 133: “Intriguing New Work for the Oboe”. Eric Ewazen and Linda Strommen discuss “Down a River of Time” by Julia Gulasy

The composer writes:

The piece, which is a contemplative journey through life, was composed as an aria with string orchestra. The oboe emulates the voice as it expresses intense emotional and personal feelings, orchestrating the importance of life’s dreams. Since the oboe is the ultimate expressive instrument – like the human voice – it speaks passionately. Furthermore, the great range of tonal colors and articulation available to the oboist have the ability to dramatically transform the feelings explored. The work captures the cycle of life in a very virtuosic manner.

Each of the movement titles, with their progression – “Past Hopes and Dreams . . . and Sorrows . . . and Memories of Tomorrow” – present imagery of traveling down the river of life with its ebb and flow. The

first movement, “. . . Past Hopes and Dreams,” is energetic, like the rushing tide of time. It is a young person’s journey – representing activity, relaxation, peace, hard work and excitement. Flourishes of energetic ostinato patterns create a feeling of water imagery in the solo part as well as the accompaniment allowing hints of impressionism to permeate the movement. Undulation between major and minor tonalities give the sense of a full range of emotional experience from a point of retrospect.

In the second movement, “. . . and Sorrows,” there is a profound sadness represented – a valley of tears. The oboe is singing a soliloquy as the string orchestra comments with ribbons of melody. There are hints of jazz-like elements with a type of minor/modal folk music intertwined. The accompaniment is rather subdued in this movement, with the lower strings prominent. Although this movement is written primarily in a minor key, major tonalities interrupt sporadically, offering glimmers of hope and comfort. Near the end of the movement lies an expressive cadenza bringing resolve to the pathos of emotions one can encounter with the impact of loss.

The third movement, “. . . and Memories of Tomorrow,” evokes a variety of emotions although, by and large, it is celebratory or joyful. This movement describes how one looks back at life and relishes the joyful memories, sometimes even forgetting the pain. The presence of gospel-type sonorities projects the image of a revival meeting. While there are some brief moments of doubt and painful times represented through the use of dissonance and rhythmic agitation, the music exudes hopeful anticipation for embracing life anew. The movement leaves the audience on the edge of their seats as it valiantly soars to a victorious and uplifting conclusion in C Major. The third movement is quite virtuosic and has been described as athletic, displaying rapid scalar runs that require the full range of the instrument from low B Natural to high F Sharp. One critic described these ascending runs as so exhilarating that they nearly propelled her to her feet.