

## About *Without A Trace* by Beverley Flanagan

Composed especially for Keith, this four-movement work blends together Native American and Taoist beliefs. There are many similarities between the two cultures. They both seek to live in harmony with Mother Earth by understanding the subtle energy that sustains life. *Without a Trace* is inspired by quotations from the *Tao Te Ching* written by Lao Tzu in the 6th century BC.

According to legend, Lao Tzu was the "keeper of the archives" at the Imperial Court. When he was 80 years old, he set out for the western border of China. He was saddened and disillusioned that men were unwilling to follow the path to goodness. At the border a guard asked Lao Tzu to record his teachings before he left. He then composed, in 5000 characters, the *Tao Te Ching* (The Way and Its Power). Upon completing the book, he then disappeared....without a trace!

The Lotus Blooms (*Empty your mind of all thoughts, let your heart be at peace*)

In the first movement, the melody floats serenely above a drone (low sustained notes). The drone represents a well grounded, peaceful and spacious heart. The lotus melody is gentle, contemplative and enchanting as it seeks to reflect the practice of meditation by releasing all thoughts.

The Buddha is often portrayed seated on a lotus flower to remind us to rise above the suffering of this world. The spirit of the best of mankind is spotless, like the lotus in the muddy water which does not adhere to it.

Ear of the Wind (*The soft overcomes the hard. The gentle overcomes the rigid*)

The second movement is inspired by the Navajo Tribe of Monument Valley (Utah). The first theme represents the mountainous rock strata imprinted with the history of its people and place. Strength, pride, bravery and resilience are all suggested by the bold and colourful chords. In contrast, the soft caressing second theme evokes the gentle movement of the wind. The love melody stirs the sands of time in the empty desert releasing stories of passions and hardships on the land. A third theme, descriptive of a hawk, bridges the two themes. As the music rides the air currents, the hawk is seeking its prey, hovering, then finally descends 'to earth' the message through the fleshy sacrifice.

The Navajo people are sustained as a nation because of their enduring faith in the Great Spirit and are the largest tribe in the US today. Ear of the Wind is an actual monument in the valley.

Wu-Wei (*Practice not doing and everything will fall into place*)

In the third movement, various melodic themes capture the landscape, temples, rivers, cherry blossoms and ancient warriors of China. The music explores the impact of cultural traditions and how they are affecting the balance of humanity's relationship with nature. Throughout the work, the bells call for "the ring of truth" as the cracks of dissonant uncertainty are beginning to show. Natural rhythms are contrasted with the rigid forcing rhythms of mechanization.

The beauty and harmony found in nature entices the people back to understanding the sacred balance between the inner and outer world. In returning to the Tao (the way or path), the soft and invisible power is revealed within all things. When in harmony with the flow, innate intelligence takes over and the right action happens by itself.

Empty Vessel (*Being and non-being create each other*)

The final movement returns to the spacious, contemplative qualities of the opening movement. Above the same drone, a new peaceful, light melody brings us to a greater mindfulness of the present moment.

It is believed that to truly let go into the flow of the Tao, one becomes like an empty vessel. Sound vibration is only transitory. We too are like the ripples on a pond and by being moved with experiences, we are enriched on every level. It is said that the Sage is able to work in harmony with the Tao by not using more energy than is needed. When the task is done, all will return back to the source.

The title of the work refers to the impermanence of all things. The aggregate movements highlight diversity in nature, cultures, and belief systems - yet these are all impermanent concepts and realities. Awareness of the present moment is the aim of these compositions. The title also aims to bring attention to the plight of the serious women composers who, as a group, are not historically well represented. Because of this, their voices have remained silent, and their work has disappeared "without a trace".