

STAGES

for wind ensemble

BRIAN BALMAGES

About the Music

In the summer of 2020, I presented a virtual clinic to a large group of music teachers in Fairfax County, Virginia. Afterward, Kelsey Burch stayed on and asked to speak with me about a project. She had recently heard *Love and Light*, a piece I wrote about the difficult subject of infant loss, miscarriage and stillbirth. And she told me she was hoping that I would take on a subject that was central to her life.

Cancer.

Kelsey was diagnosed with Stage 4 colon cancer just months earlier at the age of 34. She shared her online journals about the entire experience: the tests, the conversations, the setbacks, little victories, emotional rollercoasters and more. She wanted a piece about her cancer journey (while some patients associate with fighting or battling cancer, that metaphor never resonated with Kelsey – she felt like she was on a cancer journey and acknowledged that different metaphors work for different patients). Miraculously, she wound up in complete remission, but of course there was still concern that it would come back. And several months later, it did. And it had further metastasized in new places.

After numerous emails and a long conversation with Kelsey, I began to sketch out the framework for *Stages*. The title refers not only to the stages of cancer, but also to the accompanying stages of grief that cancer patients, their families and friends experience. And in this case, the very first marking in the piece is “4” – a reference to stage 4. The entire opening section is based on that haunting downward interval of a 4th. It feels somewhat unfocused harmonically, but it is also not overly dissonant. Essentially, it just feels like a fog. Uncertainty. The doctors had commented about how well she was taking the initial diagnosis. It wasn’t until she got home that she had a complete emotional breakdown, which fuels the next section of the piece. Anger. Screaming. Pain. Overwhelming emotions that will not stop. That moment needed to be in the piece along with the silent moments of grief that immediately follow.

It was extremely important to Kelsey that the piece include a “hope theme.” While it took her a while to get there emotionally (thus, the reason it takes so long to emerge in the music), it was critical in her journey. In her words, “you always have to have hope, sometimes because it is the only thing you have to hold on to.” The theme is introduced in the solo clarinet alongside a very transparent, almost “vulnerable” orchestration. Even when she felt like there was no hope, her therapist reminded her that every time she went to a doctor’s appointment, every time she went for chemo, she was showing hope even if she wasn’t necessarily feeling it.

The following section is the most difficult to get through. As previously stated, Kelsey wound up in complete remission after treatment following her initial diagnosis. But just before I began writing the piece, she found out that it had returned, and it had metastasized even further than before. This uncomfortable section draws on the very first measure of the piece – the opening interval of a 4th – and it slowly begins to spread throughout the ensemble. Quite literally, it metastasizes. And builds.

This is the moment that Kelsey explained her own progression through the stages of grief. That hope evolves into acceptance; however, even though it evolves, you still have to have hope. They are part of each other. And thus, the hope theme returns in a massively powerful setting – this time, in the form of acceptance.

The final section is very plaintive, soft, and distant. The interval of a 4th returns a final time, but it is not dissonant or upsetting. It is not out of focus. It is calm, yet uncertain. This section will impact people in completely different ways, depending on whether they are a cancer patient, survivor, friend or family member. That is intentional, and each listener will react according to their own personal experiences.

At the time the piece was completed, a premiere was planned for the fall or winter of 2021. However, due to the fact that Kelsey was spending more and more time in the hospital dealing with numerous challenges, I got in touch with Steve Bolstad, Director of Bands at James Madison University (my alma mater and Kelsey’s as well, where she played oboe and a lot of English Horn). Coincidentally, I was already scheduled to be at JMU in early May to work with the wind symphony. We managed to switch gears and even bumped the date up a week earlier. Thus, on April 26, 2021, we held a live-stream rehearsal and performance for Kelsey, her family, friends, and others who have been affected by cancer.

It is our hope that this music helps all those who have been touched by cancer, whether directly or indirectly. May you find comfort, peace and healing.

– Brian Balmages, 15 April 2021

Instrumentation

Piccolo
2 Flutes
2 Oboes
English Horn (cued in other instruments)
2 Bassoons
Contrabassoon (Contrabass Clarinet double – use as needed)
3 Bb Clarinets
Bass Clarinet
Bb Contrabass Clarinet
2 Alto Saxes
Tenor Sax
Baritone Sax
3 Bb Trumpets (Tpt. 1 div.)
4 Horns
4 Trombones (Trombone 4 is bass trombone)
Euphonium (div.)
Tuba (div.)
String Bass
Piano

6 Percussionists:

1 – Timpani
1 – Percussion 1 (Bells)
1 – Percussion 2 (Vibraphone, Marimba, Crotales*, Crash Cymbals*, Wind Chimes*)
1 – Percussion 3 (Crotales*, Chimes, Wind Chimes*)
2 – Percussion 4 (Crash Cymbals*, Suspended Cymbal, Snare Drum, Triangle, Bass Drum, Gong, Bell Tree)
* - shared instrument

Approximate duration: 11 minutes

STAGES

Brian Balmages (ASCAP)

"4" ($\text{J} = 64$)

8

Piccolo
Flutes
Oboes
(opt. E.H. double)
English Horn
Bassoons
B \flat Clarinets 2
Bass Clarinet
B \flat Contrabass Clarinet
Alto Saxes
Tenor Sax
Baritone Sax

"4" ($\text{J} = 64$)

8

B \flat Trumpets
F Horn
Trombones
Euphonium
Tuba
String Bass
Timpani
Percussion 1 (Bells)
Percussion 2 (Vibraphone, Marimba, Crotolas, Crash Cymbals, Wind Chimes)
Percussion 3 (Crotolas, Climes, Wind Chimes)
Percussion 4 (Crash Cymbals, Suspended Cymbal, Snare Drum, Triangle, Bass Drum, Gong, Bell Tree)
Piano

Stages – 2

18

Stages 3

25

26

34

Picc.

Fls.

Obs.

E. Hn.

Bsn.

Cls.

B. Cl.

Cb. Cl.

A. Sax.

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

46

39

Picc. *mp* *mf* *tutti* *f* *>* *>* *ff*

Fls. *mf* *f* *>* *>* *ff*

Obs. *mf* *f* *>* *>* *ff*

E. Hn. *f* *tutti* *>* *>* *ff*

Bsn. 1 *f* *>* *>* *ff*

Cl. 1 *mf* *f* *tutti* *>* *>* *ff*

Cl. 2 *play* *f* *>* *>* *ff*

B. Cl. *mp* *mf* *f* *>* *>* *ff*

Cb. Cl. *f* *tutti* *>* *>* *ff*

A. Sax. *f* *>* *>* *ff*

T. Sx. *f* *>* *>* *ff*

B. Sx. *f* *>* *>* *ff*

Tpts. *mf* *f* *div.* *ff*

Hn. *mf* *f* *ff*

Tbns. *f* *ff*

Eup. *f* *Tbn. 3* *+4.* *ff*

Tuba *f* *play* *ff*

S.B. *ff*

Tim. *ff*

Perc. 1 *f* *ff*

Perc. 2 *f* *Chimes* *ff*

Perc. 3 *f* *Crotal* *ff*

Perc. 4 *B.D.* *ff*

Pno. *mf* *f* *ff*

50

Picc.

Fls.

Obs.

E. Hn.

Bsn. 1
2

Cls. 1
2
3

B. Cl.

Cb. Cl.

A. Sax.

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

Tpts.

Hn.

Tbns.

Euph.

Tuba

S.B.

Timp.

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Perc. 3

Perc. 4

Pno.

Cr. Cym.

Chimes

S.D.

ff

ff

ff

62

56

Picc.

Fls. 1

Obs. 1

E. Hn.

Bsn. 1

Cl. 1

Cl. 2

Cl. 3

B. Cl.

Cb. Cl.

A. Sax 1

A. Sax 2

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

62

Tpts. 1

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

Tbns. 1

Euph.

Tuba

S.B.

Tim.

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Perc. 3

Perc. 4

Pno.

+ 8vb if possible

8vb if possible

loco

dampen

(ch.)

>>>

+ Gong >

p

Stages – 7

molto rall.

77 a tempo, dolce

69

Picc.

Fls. 1

Fls. 2

Obs. 1

Obs. 2

E. Hn.

Bsn. 1

Bsn. 2

Cl. 1

Cl. 2

Cl. 3

B. Cl.

Cb. Cl.

A. Sax 1

A. Sax 2

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

4

5

p

p

Solo

p

a2

p

5

4

play

p

p

molto rall.

77 a tempo, dolce

MOTTO Part.

Tpts. 1
Tpts. 2
Tpts. 3

Hn. 1
Hn. 2
Hn. 3
Hn. 4

Tbns. 1
Tbns. 2

Euph.

Tuba

S.B.

Timp.

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Perc. 3

Perc. 4

Pno.

pp mute
pp

p

1 player open

Cb. Cl.
pp

(E \flat , B, C, E \flat)

p

Vibra. $\frac{1}{2}$
p

p

5
4

5
4

poco rit.

84

85

poco rit.

Picc. 5

Fls. 4

Obs. 4

E. Hn. 3

Bsn. 1 2

tutti

Cls. 2 3

B. Cl. 5

Cb. Cl. 4

A. Sax 1 2

T. Sx. B. Sx.

poco rit.

poco rit.

85

Tpts. 5 4 3 4

Hn. tutti 8 8 8 8

Tbns. 1 2 3 4

Euph. play 8 8 8 8

Tuba pizz. 8 8 8 8

S.B. mp mf

Tim. 5 4 3 4

Perc. 1 mp

Perc. 2

Perc. 3

Perc. 4 Tri. Sus. Cym. mp < mf

Pno. mp

93 con moto, affetioso ($\text{J} = 92$)

Picc. *p* tutti

Fls. 1 *p* play

Obs. 1 *p*

E. Hn.

Bsn. 1 *mp* E.H.

Cl. 1 *mp* tutti

Cl. 2

Cl. 3

B. Cl.

Cb. Cl.

A. Sax *mp* Solo

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

93 con moto, affetioso ($\text{J} = 92$)

Tpts. 1 *mp* Solo

Hn. 1 *mp*

Tbns. 1

Tbns. 3

Eup.

Tuba

S.B.

Tim.

Perc. 1 *p*

Perc. 2 *p*

Perc. 3 Crotal

Perc. 4

Pno. *p* R.H. 8^{va} pedal each measure

109

106

poco rit.

12 8 3 4

Picc. Fls. Obs. E. Hn. Bsn. Cls. B. Cl. Cb. Cl. A. Sax. T. Sx. B. Sx.

E.H. play

12 8 3 4

Tpts. Hn. Tbns. Euph. Tuba S.B. Timp. Perc. 1 Perc. 2 Perc. 3 Perc. 4 Pno.

Solo tutti

poco rit.

109

12 8 3 4

Tpts. Hn. Tbns. Euph. Tuba S.B. Timp. Perc. 1 Perc. 2 Perc. 3 Perc. 4 Pno.

tutti

12 8 3 4

118 Lilting (d. = 40)

16 Ending (♩ = 40)

Picc.

3

Fls.

4

Obs.

E. Hn.

Bsn. 1
2

1

Cl. 2
3

3

B. Cl.

Cb. Cl.

4

A. Sax

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

118 *Lilting* ($\text{♩} = 40$)

16 Lifting (♩ = 40)

Tpts. 3
Hn. 4

Tbns.

Euph.

Tuba

S.B.

Musical score for five instruments: Timpani, Percussion 1, Percussion 2, Percussion 3, and Piano. The score is in common time (indicated by '3' over '4'). The piano part includes dynamic markings 'mf' and 'R.H. 8va'. The piano staff has a brace and a bass clef.

rit. 134 a tempo

rit. l'istesso tempo (♩=♩) poco rit. (♩=64)

130

Picc.

Fls. 1 2

Obs. 1 2

E. Hn.

Bsn. 1 2

Cls. 1 2 3

B. Cl.

Cb. Cl.

A. Sax. 1 2

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

rit. 134 a tempo

rit. l'istesso tempo (♩=♩) poco rit. (♩=64)

Tpts. 1 2 3

Hn. 1 2 3 4

Tbns. 1 2 3 4

Euph.

Tuba

S.B.

Tim.

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Perc. 3

Perc. 4

Pno.

143

146

Picc.

Fls. 1

Solo

p

2 4 3 4

Fls. 2

Solo

p mp p

Obs. 1

Obs. 2

E. Hn.

Bsn. 1 2

p

E. Hn.

Bsn. 1

Cl. 2

Cl. 3

B. Cl.

Cb. Cl.

A. Sax

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

146

Tpts. 1 2 3

Hn. 1 2

Tbns. 1 2

Eup.

Tuba

S.B.

Tim.

Perc. 1

Mar.

p

2 4 3 4

Hn. 3 4

one player + b> mp

Cb. Cl. (one player, mute)

pp

Perc. 2

Perc. 3

Bell Tree

p

Perc. 4

Tri.

p

Pno.

146

157

156

Picc. *p*

Fls. *p*

Obs. *p*

E. Hn.

Bsn. 1 (Solo) *p*

Bsn. 2 (Solo) *p*

Cl. 1 (one player) *p*

Cl. 2 *p*

B. Cl. *p*

Cb. Cl. *p*

A. Sax. *p*

T. Sx. *p*

B. Sx. *p*

tutti *mp*

(Solo) *mf*

tutti *mp*

tutti *mp*

tutti *mf*

tutti *mp*

E.H. *mp*

play

tutti *mp*

tutti *mp*

tutti *mp*

157 *p*

157

Tpts. *p*

Hn. *mp*

Tbns. *p*

Eup. *p*

Tuba *p*

S.B. *p*

Timp. *p*

Perc. 1 *p*

Perc. 2 *p*

Perc. 3 Chimes *p*

Perc. 4 *p*

Crotales bowed

mp

Pno. *p*

Stages – 15

166

molto rit. 172 Brillante (♩= 72)

166

molto rit. **172** **Brillante (♩= 72)**

Musical score page 1 showing parts for various instruments. The score includes parts for Tpts. (3 staves), Hn. (4 staves), Tbns. (4 staves), Euph. (1 staff), Tuba (1 staff), S.B. (1 staff), Timp. (1 staff), Perc. 1 (1 staff), Perc. 2 (1 staff), Perc. 3 (1 staff), Perc. 4 (1 staff), and Pno. (1 staff). The score features dynamic markings such as *tutti open*, *mf*, *f*, *ff*, *fff*, and *ff* with a 6th note. Percussion parts include mallets and bell tree. The piano part shows a dynamic *ff*.

173

Picc.

Fls.

Obs.

E. Hn.

Bsn. 1
2

Cls. 1
2
3

B. Cl.

Cb. Cl.

A. Sax.

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

Tpts.

Hn.

Tbns.

Euph.

Tuba

S.B.

Timp.

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Perc. 3

Perc. 4

Pno.

Crotales

ff

Bell Tree
strike low to high

ff

180

176

Picc.

Fls.

Obs.

E. Hn.

Bsn. 1
2

Cls. 1
2
3

B. Cl.

Cb. Cl.

A. Sax

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

180

180

Tpts.

Hn.

Tbns.

Euph.

Tuba

S.B.

Timp.

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Perc. 3

Perc. 4

Pno.

Sus. Cym. $\frac{mf}{ff}$

molto rit.

183

Picc.

Fls.

Obs.

E. Hn.

Bsn. 1
2

Cls. 1
2
3

B. Cl.

Cb. Cl.

A. Sax.

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

Tpts.

Hn.

Tbns.

Euph.

Tuba

S.B.

Timp.

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Perc. 3

Perc. 4

Pno.

molto rit.

div.

ff

mf

ff

mf

190 a tempo

rit.

Picc.

Fls. 1
Fls. 2

Obs. 1
Obs. 2

E. Hn.

Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2

Cls. 1
Cls. 2
Cls. 3

B. Cl.

Cb. Cl.

A. Sax 1
A. Sax 2

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

This section of the musical score covers measures 190 to 190a tempo. It includes parts for Picc., Flutes 1 & 2, Oboes 1 & 2, English Horn, Bassoon 1 & 2, Clarinets 1, 2, & 3, Bass Clarinet, Alto Saxophone 1 & 2, Tenor Saxophone, Bass Saxophone, and Trombones 1 & 2. The instrumentation is primarily woodwind and brass. Dynamics include *mf*, *mp*, and *p*. A specific instruction "stagger breathe" is noted for Bassoon 1. Measure 190 starts with a dynamic *p*.

190 a tempo

rit.

Tpts. 1
Tpts. 2
Tpts. 3

Hn. 1
Hn. 2

Tbns. 1
Tbns. 2

Euph.

Tuba

S.B.

Tim.

Perc. 1

Wind Chimes

Perc. 2

ff

Perc. 3

Perc. 4

B.D.

ff

Pno.

This section continues from measure 190a tempo. It includes parts for Trombones 1 & 2, Horns 1 & 2, Tuba, Bass Trombone, Euphonium, Timpani, Percussion 1, Wind Chimes, Percussion 2, Percussion 3, Percussion 4, Bass Drum, and Piano. The instrumentation shifts to brass and percussion. Dynamics include *mf*, *mp*, *ff*, and *p*. Measures 190a tempo through 190 rit. feature sustained notes and rhythmic patterns typical of a military or marching band style.

202 Tempo I ($\downarrow = 64$)

199

Picc.

Fls. 1

Fls. 2

Obs. 1

E. Hn.

Bsn. 1

Cl. 1

Cl. 2

Cl. 3

B. Cl.

Cb. Cl.

A. Sax

T. Sx.

B. Sx.

rit.

pp

pp

morendo

202 Tempo I ($\downarrow = 64$)

Tpts. 1

Tpts. 2

Hn. 1

Hn. 2

Tbns. 1

Tbns. 2

Euph.

Tuba

S.B.

Tim.

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Perc. 3

Perc. 4

Pno.

rit.

p

Vibra.
bowed

p

pp

morendo

p