

Jessie's Well

Ralph Hultgren

Jessie's Well

Program notes:

Here is the story that defines this work – the identity of the person involved is for him and me to know. The abridged note (for your program) follows at the end of the story.

For some reason known only to him, a colleague thought I did not like him and that I actively worked against him and his success. This angered me no end! Much to my amazement, when my life changed at my Christian epiphany, my anger turned to sadness. What had I done that would turn a fine young musician so solidly against me? I was moved to deal with this problem but had no understanding of how I might do so. I was deeply distressed by this.

Circumstances were that I had the chance to adjudicate his group (something that had caused him angst in the past – little did I realise that). At the conclusion of the performance, which was first class, we chatted and I broached the subject of the apparent division between us. We talked haltingly that night about matters around and about that problem.

After that I visited his school twice. I conducted a workshop with his fine band where he sat taking notes. He said he had learned a great deal as he watched me work with his students. We shared dinner in a restaurant during that visit and he invited me to his home for dinner with his family when I returned the second time. It was a wonderful night of openness, frank discussion and much joy and some tears. His second child, Jessie, made me a place mat for my position at the table. It said how it was good that I was there with them and especially with her Daddy. It was an honest child's comment on what had been a sad adult dilemma.

We spoke of me writing something for his group that first night. We spoke more the second time we met, when I worked with his ensemble and I decided that I would write something about places on the journey from his town to mine. One such place, just off the main road, is Jessie's Well. The title created itself that day as I drove past and thought of a pure child's simple and gentle summation of what is now a lasting friendship and a blessing to both families.

The note for your program:

Jessie's Well is a simple story that comes from the pure heart of a young child, immersed in her love for her Daddy and overjoyed at the peace he has found. The melody is Jessie's story, incomplete at times, like the simple wondering of a child. It's Jessie wandering, singing and not finishing the song, as a child often does. The melody drifts in and out but comes back to be completed, like it had never been the intention to leave it incomplete.

Rehearsal notes:

The tempo should not be rushed and the lines should be considered as though they are speaking their story and wandering in and out of Jessie's story.

Dialogue underpins the opening and a sense of chamber music permeates the texture from the beginning until around 60. This is delicate playing and transparent orchestration and should be handled thus.

The tempo is slow but it should not be dragged. A sense of the need for *rubato* and musical shaping should inform every decision in interpreting this score. Solo voices must speak clearly and tutti *fortes* need power and presence without being dominant.

The last section from 93 should ebb away. The dialogue connects from the beginning again and the interpolation of the trombone figure at 98 – 100 should be taken as tonal sighs more than dissonant commentary. The last few bars can be quite slow.

Please aim for clarity in communication here – no melodrama or pontificating. Allow the music to speak in a child like manner.

Thank you

Ralph Hultgren