

# Symphony No. 3: Altered Landscape

## Instrumentation

- 3 Flutes (3<sup>rd</sup> doubling Piccolo), 3 Oboes (3<sup>rd</sup> doubling English Horn), 3 Clarinets in Bb (3<sup>rd</sup> doubling Bass Clarinet), 3 Bassoons (3<sup>rd</sup> doubling Contrabassoon)
- 4 Horns in F, 3 Trumpets (in C and Bb), 3 Trombones, 1 Tuba
- Timpani; Perc. 1: Bass Drum (largest available), Triangle (med), Brake Drum, Cabasa, Glockenspiel, Suspended Cymbal, Vibraslap, Tom-toms (hi-med-med lo-lo), Cowbells (hi-lo), Ride Cymbal, Güiro, Perc. 2: Vibraphone, Tam-tam, Crash Cymbals, Suspended Cymbal, Ratchet, Brake Drum, Vibraslap, Tom-toms (hi-med-med lo-lo); Perc. 3: Bass Drum (largest available), Claves, Triangle (hi-med), Tam-tam, Vibraslap, Cabasa, Ratchet, Mark Tree, Crash Cymbals,
- Harp
- Strings

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Duration: 35 minutes

When I was initially approached by Conductor Laura Jackson to write a piece inspired by "Altered Landscape" a stunning photographic collection housed at the Nevada Museum of Art, the world was still oblivious to the grueling test it would endure just a few months later. Written fully within 2020, this symphony accompanies the fate that humanity has undergone—and has mostly inflicted upon itself and the planet—since the end of WWII all the way until, hopefully, a not-so-distant and hypothetical future, where we will have finally learned to coexist in harmony with Earth.

Widely accepted as the geological epoch that we now live in, the Anthropocene acknowledges the significant impact that humans have had over our planet's ecosystems and geology, as measured by accelerating Earth System and Socio-Economic Trends. The first movement, by far the symphony's most substantial and extensive, portrays the relentless growth rate in human activity also known as "The Great Acceleration", which started in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and continues to this day. Or does it?

"Stillness", the second movement, depicts the months immediately following the World Health's Organization's declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic. A time during which the world came to a halt, and that (as I write this words in February of 2021) is yet far from over. Has the *Great Acceleration* come to a close? Untenable in the long run, some of its exponentially rising trends were already slowing down prior to the pandemic, but one thing we know for sure is that the worldwide health crisis we are facing now will serve as a catalyst for change that will have lasting consequences on our behavior. In this movement we mostly focus on the pain, loss, and suffering that we have collectively sustained, at times trying to go back to our old ways, only to realize that there is simply no return.

"Reckoning" is a profoundly meditative movement with underlying echoes of the Gayatri Mantra (a Sanskrit chant considered sacred) echoing throughout its melodies and rising harmonies. It is an invitation to close our eyes, look inward, and find that inner peace so elusive to contemporary humans accustomed to silencing their inmost thoughts with the never-ending rattle and outward distractions of the modern world. Needless to say, had

we not been forced to remain still and confront our deepest thoughts and fears, this moment of rebirth would have never taken place.

“Alignment” brings back musical elements from all prior movements, but unlike its predecessors, it is luminous in character and filled with hope. It envisions a world in which us humans have finally reached a level of maturity and awareness that allows us to continue our scientific advances and technological development without damaging the planet that gave us birth. It is filled with the promise of human ingenuity, pointing toward a future where we have finally mastered the balancing act between our individual desires for a better and more comfortable life, and the greater good of our fellow human beings and our planet. Idealistic? Without a doubt. Impossible? Only we, collectively, hold the answer to that question.

This is a work of confluences, preceded by extensive statistical research, informed by science, and inspired by the art of photography. The acoustic cornerstone of this piece can be found in the Schumann resonances, which are global electromagnetic resonances generated by electric activity within the Earth’s cavity (within the ionosphere and the surface) and which emit a continual electromagnetic vibration whose fundamental tone is 7.83 Hertz, equal to the pitch B-natural. In fact, I have been personally developing a system of pitch and frequency organization based on the Schumann resonances, and I am keen on exploring that system in further works as well. Also notable are the remarkable similarities that our brain waves and their spectral patterns share with Schumann resonances, pointing toward a more intrinsic union between us and our environment that we were previously aware of.

It is with enormous gratitude that I have dedicated this work to Laura Jackson and the Reno Phil. Their vision, determination, and unwavering faith in this project were able to keep it afloat in the darkest hours, so it is with great joy and pride that I now present it to them. Joy because composing it kept my gaze focused on the future rather than the present (which at the time of composition was incredibly challenging, to put it mildly), and pride because completing it gave me a sense of achievement and purpose when many of us, creative and performing artists, were questioning our own usefulness, especially after being relegated to the outer fringes of what was being considered essential (even though, for many of us, there is nothing more essential than music). My gratitude also goes to the Nevada Museum of Art for giving us exclusive access to its exquisite photographic collection and for their involvement in this project since its inception.

Whether we want to acknowledge it or not, we live in an *altered* world now, but the future has not yet been written, and which direction we take from now on, is entirely up to us. May this symphony be a testament to the vision of a world everyone involved in this project wants to see themselves live in, and may it plant a seed of hope and beauty in all of us, especially in our children...and the children of our children. For it is important to understand that we are all part of a grand and majestically interconnected organism, and that our actions never occur in a vacuum, as they have inescapable consequences for us and future generations.