

Letters from Gettysburg

Composer: Avner Dorman
Year: 2013
Duration: 25 min
Orchestration: 10[=6] perc
Publisher: G Schirmer Inc

Program Note

Letters from Gettysburg is based on letters written by 1st Lieutenant Rush P. Cady - Co. K, 97th New York Infantry, who was wounded during the Battle of Gettysburg and died a few weeks later; some text is also from a letter written by his mother at his deathbed.

Peter Carmichael, the Director of the Civil War Institute at Gettysburg College, first suggested the source text for this piece to me. As I was reading the letters, I realized that by focusing on the experiences of a single soldier and his family I could tell a universal story. The story of a young soldier - naïve, brave, committed, and ultimately - still a child, and the worries and pain that war inflicts on his family.

There are wonderful paradoxes that run through this collection of letters. On the one hand, Rush repeatedly minimizes the importance of his own words with phrases such as "I have nothing of importance to communicate." On the other hand, in some letters he expresses very strong political convictions and presents them very convincingly. Even after he is wounded, he makes the effort to send a positive message to his parents, "I'm keeping up good courage, I'm in a good place," when it is obvious that he is in a lot of pain.

The composition is written in five movements organized in a symmetrical arc form. The first and last movements use text from the letter Rush's mother wrote at his deathbed to his father. The first movement focuses on Rush's plea to his mother to kiss him and pray for him, while the last movement focuses on Mrs. Cady's inability

to deal with her son's impending death.

Movements two and four quote letters written by Rush to his family. The former uses the opening of the earliest letter in the collection - long before the Battle of Gettysburg, while the latter is taken from the first letter Rush wrote to his parents after being wounded in the battle.

Movement three, titled "Battle," uses words, fragments, and sentences, taken from many different letters, all depicting the pain and horror of war.

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