
DEATH'S DOOR

for clarinet in B-flat, horn in F, violin, cello, and piano

JACOB BERANEK

PROGRAM NOTES

Commissioned by the Midsummer's Music Festival for their 27th season, *Death's Door* for clarinet, horn, violin, cello, and piano, is a musical depiction of the Porte des Morts Strait in northeastern Wisconsin.

I have always been captivated by the mystical tales surrounding the *Porte des morts*, or in English, “the Door of Death.” This narrow strait lies between Green Bay and Lake Michigan, directly at the tip of the Door Peninsula (which takes its name from the same body of water). Over the course of recorded history, the *Porte des morts* has claimed over 250 vessels, with some experts claiming the location boasts more shipwrecks than any other stretch of fresh water in the world. Ironically, though, not a single life has ever been lost as a result of a wreck amidst these treacherous shoals—the foreboding moniker actually originates from a legendary Native American battle. As I plunged deeper into this vivid history, I was inspired to write a poem, also entitled *Death's Door* (which I have included on the following page). From this text, I based my new musical composition.

This quintet embodies a journey through time marked by three distinct sections, with each section being derived from a line in my poem. After the plaintive, opening clarinet solo (which represents the original native inhabitants of the area), the first major section of the composition commences in accordance with the line “disclosing tales of eons long-expired.” This section is a narrative in and of itself, weaving through forgotten centuries with music that ebbs and flows. After an eery, fluid transition, the second section erupts with a jaunty jig (“when schooners, barks, and brigs arose”). Here, there is a glimpse of a reckless crew of sailors as they test the limits of the *Porte des morts*—and the water wins. As their ship sinks, the music capsizes with it, splintering and shuddering until finally succumbing to the turbulent waves. The final section (“while upon these ancient gales I muse”) emerges from this cacophony, evolving from an echo of the opening clarinet solo. The piece builds to a triumphant conclusion, corresponding with the reassurance found in the final lines of my poem: “So, why find respite in this hostile setting? Simply that amid such death, I live.”

—Jacob Beranek

Death's Door (2016) by Jacob Beranek

Like shards of well-hewn glass
trampled underfoot, shells crunch,
their decaying stench emitting,
amidst craggled trees and lulling waves.

Crisp air mingles with weathered stone,
disclosing tales of eons long-expired.^{*}
of Potawatomi and of Winnebago,
this sharp wind's breath recalls.

And, on these pulverized stones
where seagulls and valiant Frenchmen
alike have trod, this serene spot
bears treacherous moniker.

Rightly so, though tranquil may it seem:
where speckled gulls bob as buoys
once was, as in Pharaoh's time,
stained crimson in wake of Natives' clash.

In trailing centuries, this crusade was
memorialized in name only;
newfangled events usurped legend
when schooners, barks, and brigs arose.^{*}

These seafaring vessels did christen
the label *Porte des morts*, as *Nichols*,
Forest, and *Gilmore's* memories
were sacrificed on its wicked shoals.

In their distress, though by Pilot redeemed,
living members not one did add
a single droplet of mariner-blood
to the previous libation decanted.

Still, while upon these ancient gales I muse^{*}
and gaze 'cross the yawning pale-blue expanse,
from alluring mirage the foundered wrecks
in their murky depths, shorn on shallows, call.

Here I find that to breathe deeply is
to sin against this gorish land's end
and to challenge those distraught
who waded these perilous shores.

Behemoth I feel. Unavailing
sand tries to drag me downward;
amused, I overpower it,
lest I join the ranks of dead.

It's in this small triumph, I feel
God's kind hand: recall that we were made
in Their likeness, not only to rule
over sea's fish and sky's birds,


but also to commune and
partake in Nature's full bounty.
That to fulfill this is to achieve
Adam's first intention, I have no doubt.

So, why find respite in this hostile setting?
Simply that amid such death, I live.

^{*} These lines directly correspond to the three sections of this piece (see m. 7, 94, and 198).

PERFORMANCE NOTES

All trills are chromatic unless specified otherwise in the score.

Violin and cello: All slides () are to be performed as continuous *glissandi* unless accompanied by the word *port.*, in which case a minimal, more expressive slide should be performed.

Piano: Unless explicitly notated (like m. 1, 20–22, 48–49, etc.), the frequency of pedaling is left to the discretion of the performer.

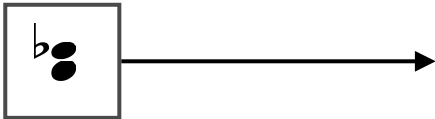
Guide to Aleatoric Notation:



Sustain the note for the duration of the line.



Sustain the note through the barline for the duration of the line.



Play random chromatic combinations between and including the given pitches, constantly varying the patterns, occasionally repeating notes.*
(Rhythms should be random and constantly changing, unless specified otherwise in the score.)



Repeat enclosed pattern for the duration of the line.

FIRST PERFORMANCE

July 19, 2017, Woodwalk Gallery, Egg Harbor, WI,
Daniel Won (clarinet), John Fairfield (horn), David Perry (violin),
Walter Preucil (cello), Daniel Paul Horn (piano)

* description adapted from John Corigliano's *Symphony No. 1* (G. Schirmer, Inc. 1990)

TRANSPOSSED SCORE

duration: c. 17' 00"

Commissioned by the Midsummer's Music Festival, Door County, WI,
Dr. James Berkenstock, Artistic Director, with Support from the MMG Foundation

Death's Door

Jacob Beranek

Clarinet in B \flat

Horn in F

Violin

Cello

Piano

Slowly—calling, reminiscing
(without time or tempo)

n freely *p* *pp* *mp* *pp* *p* *pp* *mp* *mf*

c. 30"–40"

(depress damper pedal for entire Cl. solo)

B \flat Cl.

Pno.

2 Flowing ($\text{♩} = c. 54$)

p *n* *pp* *mp*

pp freely (pedal freely)

p *mp*

B \flat Cl.

Pno.

7 "Disclosing tales of eons long-expired" ($\text{♩} = c. 60$) poco accel. rit. a tempo ($\text{♩} = c. 60$)

pp *p* *cresc.* *molto sost.* *f*

Vln.

Pno.

p *mf*

mp

14

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vc.

Pno.

Measures 14-16 of the score. The B♭ Clarinet part starts with a rest in 3/4 time, then enters in 4/4 with a *p* dynamic. The Violin part has a triplet in 3/4 and continues in 4/4 with dynamics *p*, *pp*, and *mp*. The Viola part has a rest in 3/4 and enters in 4/4 with a *p* dynamic. The Piano part features chords in 3/4 and moving lines in 4/4 with dynamics *mf*, *p*, and *mp*. A *(non harm.)* marking is present above the Violin staff in measure 16.

17

B♭ Cl.

Vln.

Vc.

Pno.

Measures 17-19 of the score. The B♭ Clarinet part starts in 3/4 with *mf* and continues in 2/4 and 3/4. The Violin part has a *pizz.* marking in 3/4, followed by *f* and *arco mp* in 2/4 and 3/4. The Viola part has *mf* in 3/4 and *f* in 2/4 and 3/4. The Piano part has *f* in 3/4 and *mf* in 2/4 and 3/4.

20

B♭ Cl.

Hn.

Vln.

Vc.

Pno.

Measures 20-22 of the score. The B♭ Clarinet part starts in 3/4 with *f*, then changes to 4/4 with *mf*, *p*, *mf*, and *n* in 5/4. The Horn part has *mf* in 3/4, *f* in 4/4, and *mp* in 5/4. The Violin part has *f* in 3/4, *p* and *f* in 4/4, and *p* in 5/4. The Viola part has *p* and *f* in 4/4 and *p* in 5/4. The Piano part has *f* in 3/4 and rests in 4/4 and 5/4.

Death's Door

25

B♭ Cl. *p* *n* *n* *p* *n*

Hn. *p* *mf* *p*

Vln. *n* *p* *n* *n* *p* *n*

Vc. *p* *mf* *p*

Pno. *p* *delicately*

29

B♭ Cl. *mp* *mf* *ord. 3* *mp* *mf*

Hn. *mp* *mf*

Vln. *mp* *pp* *mp* *mf*

Vc. *mp* *mf*

Pno. *mf* *mf*

33

B♭ Cl. *p* *mp* *5* *3* *6*

Hn. *p* *mp* *3*

Vln. *p* *mp* *6* *6*

Vc. *mp* *3* *5* *5* *6*

Pno. *mp* *mf* *5* *3* *6*

