

PROGRAM NOTES  
Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra

Having spent many years of my adolescence playing in youth orchestras, counting endless measures, playing trombone for only a few passages, and then frustratingly having to count more measures of rest yet again, I resorted to frequent musical daydreams. In fact, I used to have musical nightmares about not being able to contain myself any longer, and would visualize myself jumping up from the back of the orchestra to unleash improvisations much to the conductor's horror. So imagine how my wheels began turning when in 1991 I was approached by the Greater Bridgeport Symphony Youth Orchestra (in my home State of Connecticut) to compose a work utilizing their high-school aged students.

Being a veteran of that scene, and a strong advocate for the arts in our schools, I couldn't resist the chance to compose for these forces. My goal was to write a challenging work that would keep all sections of the orchestra on their toes, expose them to odd time signatures, polytonality, and above all, remind them that music was supposed to be joyous, energetic, beautiful, adventurous, powerful, and even humorous!

The name of the 3rd Movement, "*James Brown in The Twilight Zone*", might benefit from a note of explanation. The title refers to dual compositional elements used throughout; 2 bars from the "turn-around" of the GodFather of Soul's "I Feel Good", and an ascending chromatic passage (originating in the piano and pizzicato strings) which is reminiscent of the music used in Rod Serling's innovative TV anthology. In addition to these very American cultural influences, the First Gulf war was being waged and Middle Eastern threads started to weave through the music. The 2nd Movement, "*Sorrow Floats*", is a reflective Adagio; I must admit I was inspired to name the movement after a chapter title from one of my favorite novels by John Irving. The 1st Movement, "*Paradise Utopia*", is sizzling with American expansionist energy. I imagine a Donald Trump-like figure maniacally rebuilding the New York skyline. Jazz elements were inescapable, and realizing my old nightmare/dream, quite a bit of the trombone solo is meant to be improvised.

I had the opportunity to record the concerto along with several other selections with my old friend, innovative banjo player and musical partner, Bill Crofut, our buddy, guitarist Joel Brown, and the wonderful London Symphony Orchestra. The sessions were recorded at Abbey Road Studios (where we even met Sir Paul!) and can be heard on my CD, *Bach to Brubeck* on Koch International Classics.

On a whim, I sent the London tapes to the Boston Symphony's Doug Yeo. In addition to his international reputation as a virtuoso trombonist, Doug has his finger on the pulse of what is going on in the trombone world. Luckily for me, Doug was very enthusiastic about my piece. We have since become friends and I am so honored (not to mention grateful!) that he has championed my composition to the "classical" trombone community. He has performed it at the 1999 International Trombone Festival and with the Boston Pops (including on "Evening at Pops" on PBS stations) to glowing reviews. The piece has since been played by many orchestras, including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, the Pittsburgh Symphony, the Czech National Symphony Orchestra, the Chicago Sinfonietta, and the Auckland Symphony Orchestra, among others.