

# Birthday Symphony, Piano Quintet Edition

for Violin, Viola, Violoncello, and Piano

Composed May 9—October 20, 2013

Duration: about 30 minutes

In early 2010, I had a peculiar dream of a respectful conversation with Elvis Presley. He said I should write a symphony based on speeches by Martin Luther King Jr. Well—who can refuse the King of Rock and/or Roll? Especially since I share my birthday, January 15, with MLK, and classical radio stations frequently play a composer's music on his birthday.

My first try was that fall in the preliminary chamber form of a string trio. However this turned out to be best on its own, and is now called *Ananda Trio*. I let the idea stew until May 2013, while looking for opportunities to have orchestral works performed.

The speeches of Martin Luther King are copyrighted, and the MLK Center is notoriously litigious. Thus this cannot be a choral work, nor can it have direct references to texts in the score. Instead I use the rhythms and inflections from speeches that are incorporated in themes. The first movement uses a few phrases from the “How long? Not long” speech of March 25, 1965 at the Alabama State Capitol. The second movement is based on the Buddhist mantra “Gate gate, paragate, parasamgate, bhodi swaha”; this can be roughly translated (as by Ram Dass) as “Beyond, beyond the beyond, beyond the beyond the beyond, hail the goer.” The third movement returns to MLK and uses bits of the “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” speech given on April 3, 1968 in Memphis Tennessee. The fourth movement is the only one that uses a long passage rather literally; the final section of the Dream Speech given at the March on Washington on August 28, 1968. This movement was commenced on August 28, 2013, during the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. If sometime in the future the legal situation clears, the last movement could be performed with a narrator; the correspondence of words to notes is made clear in a private unpublished edition.

The premiere performance of this piece was of the chamber edition for violin, clarinet, cello and piano on February 18, 2014.

Accidentals hold through the measure and not beyond, and do not refer to other octaves. Sometimes I include courtesy accidentals to avoid confusion.

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*cover photograph: March on Washington, August 28, 1963*