

PROGRAM NOTES: “Dooryard Bloom”

A near impossible task...to write about this piece of music which sets Walt Whitman's "Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd". Normally, for a composer, the explanation of a piece is a much more straightforward affair. In this particular case, it is extremely difficult, maybe not even possible, for the text discusses and explores so many aspects of grief and loss. As a composer, I am hesitant to tread in this area with words (because Whitman did it so masterfully); I feel that only the musical notes that I write can do so in an appropriate manner. I can tell you, however, that I was moved by all of the stages of grief that Whitman examines in this poem, and that I was struck by the fact that he captures the extreme range of emotions that we all must face at some point. My title, "Dooryard Bloom" is a play of words on Whitman's title. A dooryard is defined as the yard next to the door of a house...which in this poem could mean many things...is the yard the hereafter? Or is it a place leading to a passage? What is the bloom? The growth of a flower or a view of light? The lilacs blooming...are they representative of death or of life? Or of growth? Or of time passing...lilacs last. The beauty of music is the power to suggest things that even words might not convey. Therefore, take your own meaning from this piece, literally or emotionally or metaphorically...let it be your own dooryard.

This work was commissioned in 2004 and premiered by the Brooklyn Philharmonic, Michael Christie, conducting.

--Jennifer Higdon