

*of Deborah, for Deborah*  
program note

To begin with, the notes and harmonies of the piece are made from Deborah's name, according to the German language association of notes and letters:

D = D

E = E

B = Bb

(o and r have no analogs to musical notes)

A = A

H = B

These notes - D E Bb A B - permeate the piece in many, many ways. This is one of the ways in which the title *of Deborah, for Deborah* has meaning: the piece is literally made of "Deborah".

Those of us who knew her know that much of Deborah's identity as a person and as a musician was shaped by her work with singers and by growing up with string players. Singing, playing string instruments and playing the harp – these are all about breathing, either literally or figuratively. Deborah's battle for her life was also all about breathing: how to keep it healthy and strong in the face of tremendous odds. Breathing is literally incorporated into the sounds of the piece – the sounds and gestures of exhaling and inhaling.

The structure of the piece also reflects Deborah's identity. The structure of breathing (inhale followed by hold followed by exhale) is quite literally mirrored in the piece's design. The piece is made of nine sections, each identical in length: 31 bars. The fifth - or middle - section is the source for all the other eight. It contains everything - all the rhythms, all the notes, all the music from which the other eight are made. I think of this 'source' as the piece's complete identity in concentrated form. It is a musical analog to Deborah's identity. Sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9 are effectively variations on section 5 in that each consists of a subtraction of some kind from the material in section 5. That subtraction can consist of either literally removing notes in the various variations from the equivalent moment of section 5. Or it could be sustaining notes in the various variations at the equivalent moment in which they are initiated in section 5. One could literally lay any variation on top of section 5 and it will line up perfectly with 5 (the source) or any of the other variations.

The symbolism of this structure as it relates to the reflection of a composer on the life of his sister is something I leave to you to consider. I'll say only that there are many layers of meaning for me. This way of making music is a personal inquiry into the nature of musical sound as it travels through time, constantly changing but constantly returning to familiar territory. How this way of hearing musical sound connects to one's thoughts and feelings about a very special human life is the subject of *of Deborah, for Deborah*.

Joel Hoffman

