

Note from the composer

My dear friend Peter Kovner commissioned this fantasia for saxophone and piano as a memorial to his beloved sister Kay. In it, I attempted to evoke something of the exuberance and the poignance of her life as I understood it. The music traces a path through the joys, playfulness, hopes, tribulations and torments of childhood, nostalgia, longing, melancholy, exuberant Dionysian abandon, frenzy, illness; and concludes with a sense of the radiant, courageous spirit which survives and which, perhaps, represents her true legacy.

In the opening section, each of the sonorous minor sevenths in the lower registers of the piano initiates a new stage of emergence into the awakening radiance of innocent childhood. The turbulent section which follows portrays the tribulations and torments caused by the cruelty of schoolmates, yielding to the melancholy of solitude.

Kay's sojourn in Rome is evoked by an homage to Nino Rota, the composer of the matchless music for most of Fellini's films, including 'La dolce vita.' Peter expressed the wish that I would at some point pay tribute to my love of vintage Motown, which is why the work also includes an homage to Junior Walker; this is also a reference to the 1960s, a period which Kay - like so many of us - experienced with particular intensity. Neither homage involves any conscious quotations, but I enjoyed the challenge of integrating multiple styles and emotional states within a twelve-minute span. The work's title is taken from a moving e-mail I received from Peter.

The multiphonics in mm. 314-333 are derived from the book 'Hello Mr. Sax' by Jean-Marie Londeix. I wish to express my gratitude to M. Londeix, and also to Matthew Hindson, who devised the user-friendly font for creating fingering charts, and made it available without charge to all composers. I also owe a deep debt of gratitude toward Dr. Jennifer Bill, whose peerless technique, musicianship and sensitivity inspired me to write the piece for her, and to Peter Kovner, for inviting me to embark on this adventure in homage to his beloved sister.

'A deep clear breath of life' was first performed on February 15, 2013 at Boston University, by Dr. Jennifer Bill, saxophone, and Yoshiko Kline, piano.

All trills (except those notated as tremolos) are semitonal.

-John Plant