

ROBERT SIROTA

COMPOSER

PROGRAM NOTES

212 SYMPHONY No. 1 (2007)

Program note by Robert Sirota:

Although I have written a number of concertos and several other fairly substantial orchestral works, I will confess that I found the prospect of composing a full-length symphony to be somewhat daunting. But as I began to sketch ideas for *212*, I realized that the scope and breadth of the subject – Manhattan – demanded nothing less than an extended, multi-movement form. In framing the four movements of this 25-minute work, I have tried to portray Manhattan as I have experienced it: a place of incomparable majesty, vitality, tragedy, and hope.

The first movement, "Approaches", is the most visual of the four movements. It conjures up views of the city, some iconic, some obscure, that we experience upon approaching Manhattan from various directions.

The end of the first movement is interrupted by a subway train (specifically, the number 2 express rumbling through the 59th Street station) which dissolves, without pause, into the second movement, "Do Not Hold Doors". I have appropriated this ubiquitous subway instruction because I liked the fact that its four words contain, consecutively, two, three, four, and five letters. The primary theme of this jazzy movement, introduced by a quartet of saxophones, is a syncopated four-chord tune in which the chords consist, respectively, of two, three, four, and five notes. At the beginning of the movement, you might also notice, after the contrabassoon solo, a distinctive three-note whine that the 2-train makes when it releases its brakes just prior to moving (it's g -f- e, octave-displaced into a rising figure.)

The second movement emerges from underground to Ground Zero, to a panicked chorus of sirens and car alarms leading to the third movement, "Lamentation". This meditation on the victims of 9/11 is a transcription for string orchestra of the middle movement of my string quartet, *Triptych*, which was composed in 2002.

The final very quiet and agonized tones of the third movement evaporate, and the fourth movement, "O Manhattan" is introduced by offstage horns. This finale is a hymn to our Manhattan, more precious and hopeful than ever.

212 is lovingly dedicated to the memory of my father, Harry Sirota, a truly great New Yorker.