

Flute Music for Remembrance and Healing:
Uncovering the Commissioned Works of the NFA's "AIDS Memorial Concert" Series

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by

Vincenzo Volpe
M13472883

B.A., Case Western Reserve University, 2017
M.M., University of Toronto, 2019

1508 Chestnut Blvd.
Cuyahoga Falls, OH 44223
volpevg@ucmail.uc.edu

Prof. Demarre McGill, Advisor

Dr. Heather Verbeck, Committee Member

Dr. Thomas Gamboa, Committee Member

Abstract:

During the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1990s, classical composers in the United States shared their reactions to this health crisis through texted music. Purely instrumental music was also composed during the AIDS crisis, but very little information about this music exists. With the exception of one dissertation by Ostermiller about two solo pieces for piano¹ and multiple sources that discuss Corigliano's Symphony No. 1, current scholarship ignores the presence of other textless classical works. In this proposal, I introduce works composed for and premiered at the "AIDS Memorial Concert" series of the National Flute Association from 1995 to 1999. I argue that studying and performing this chamber music fills a noticeable gap in research about AIDS-related instrumental music while also demonstrating the importance of such music and concerts as conduits for remembrance and healing during the AIDS crisis. I will present new information collected from self-conducted interviews with living composers, performers, and audience members who played a part in the "AIDS Memorial Concert" series and ultimately write a comprehensive history of these concerts and the commissioned works. My research will repair the NFA's missing institutional history regarding the "AIDS Memorial Concert" series, expand current conversations about AIDS-related instrumental music, and secure these important works of remembrance and healing within the flute repertory.

Statement of Purpose:

During the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1990s, classical composers in the United States shared their reactions to this health crisis through texted music. Projects like the AIDS Quilt Songbook featured classical art songs and Broadway-style numbers in order to raise

¹ Ostermiller, "Musical Responses to AIDS."

awareness about this deadly disease. Classical composers wrote purely instrumental music in response to AIDS as well. With the exception of one dissertation by Ostermiller about two solo pieces for piano² and multiple sources that discuss Corigliano's Symphony No. 1, current scholarship, however, ignores the presence of other textless classical works. This neglect of classical music without words causes an archival gap in repertoire written about AIDS and prohibits a cohesive scholarly history about AIDS-related instrumental music. Furthermore, the absence of this music diminishes knowledge about how such music mediates trauma, memory, and healing for people affected by this global health crisis.

Part of this forgotten instrumental music exists in the history of the "AIDS Memorial Concert" series of the National Flute Association, which ran from 1995 to 1999 and birthed a collection of six commissioned chamber works. This lecture-recital addresses the history of the "AIDS Memorial Concert" series and examines each of the six commissioned works in an effort to reconstitute the music in the flute repertoire and in conversations about AIDS-related instrumental music. I argue that studying and performing this chamber music fills a noticeable gap in research about AIDS-related instrumental music while also demonstrating the importance of such music and concerts as conduits for remembrance and healing during the AIDS crisis.

In order to fill the archival gap regarding this concert series and its music, I will present new information collected from self-conducted interviews with living composers, performers, and audience members who played a part in the "AIDS Memorial Concert" series. One article from the NFA *Flutist Quarterly* mentions the concert series briefly,³ but I will gather additional information in conversation with George Pope, the concert's organizer. Using the personal

² Marcus B. Ostermiller, "Musical Responses to AIDS: Meaning and Signification in Two Works for Solo Piano by Robert Savage and Kevin Oldham" (PhD diss., New York University, 2015).

³ Joanna Bassett, "Collaboration and Catalyst," *Flutist Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (2018): 48–50.

experiences shared by all of these people, I will write a comprehensive history of the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series and supplying additional programmatic information for each of the six commissioned works. My research will repair the NFA’s missing institutional history regarding the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series, expand current conversations about AIDS-related instrumental music, and secure these important works of remembrance and healing within the flute repertory.

Background:

The AIDS epidemic began quietly on June 5, 1981 when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced the first cases of the acquired immunodeficiency disease (AIDS) in the United States.⁴ Neither the general public nor the medical community could comprehend the acceleration and devastation of this disease that would quickly follow. After only a decade, AIDS infected more than 200,000 people in the United States and took 100,000 of those lives.⁵ As research progressed, medical professionals identified the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) as a precursor to AIDS and found that both viruses are only transmittable through bodily fluids. Education and prevention programs helped to inform the public about both viruses, but the number of infections and deaths continued to soar throughout the early 1990s.⁶ Statistically speaking, HIV/AIDS impacted queer men and intravenous-drug users the most of any

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “HIV and AIDS – United States, 1981-2000,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 50, no. 21 (2001): 430-434.

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Current Trends Mortality Attributable to HIV Infection/AIDS – United States, 1981-1990,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 40, no. 3 (1991): 41-44.

⁶ CDC, “HIV and AIDS 1981-2000,” 430-434.

population, but the emotional effects of this health crisis affected everyone. Naturally, this emotional trauma prompted an outpouring of creative art, including music of many genres.

Musical reactions to AIDS surfaced in the 1990s after a delayed response to the epidemic.⁷ Whether stifled by fear, denial, or shock, the public musical response to the virus was silence until musicians felt compelled to enter the conversation. The majority of music creation happened in the genres of pop and rock, where artists used lyrics to immortalize their emotions. Broadway broke its silence with the “rock musical” *Rent* in 1996, which contains multiple HIV-positive characters who sing about their social and personal experiences with the virus.⁸ Perhaps the most successful music project was the *AIDS Quilt Songbook* of 1992, a collection of eighteen songs written by eighteen different composers that address HIV/AIDS either directly or metaphorically.⁹ Inspired by the national AIDS Memorial Quilt, the *AIDS Quilt Songbook* is a patchwork of classical art songs and Broadway-style numbers with the explicit purpose of describing the effects of the virus on the music industry.

Composers also created classical music without lyrics in reaction to AIDS. The first major work to take AIDS as its central theme was John Corigliano’s Symphony No. 1, written in 1990 as a commission for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra’s centennial celebration.¹⁰ In the notes about the symphony, Corigliano writes that he experienced “feelings of loss, anger, and

⁷ Matthew Christen Tift, "Musical AIDS: Music, Musicians, and the Cultural Construction of HIV/AIDS in the United States" (PhD diss., The University of Wisconsin - Madison, 2007), 11-12.

⁸ Tift, “Musical AIDS,” 6.

⁹ Keith Ward, "And Trouble Came: Musical Responses to AIDS," *American Music* 16, no. 3 (1998): 352.

¹⁰ K. Robert Schwarz, "A Symphony for the Age of AIDS -- John Corigliano's Symphony no. 1 Performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Under Daniel Barenboim," *Musical America* 9 (1991): 43.

frustration” for friends and colleagues who died of AIDS.¹¹ Inspired by the AIDS Memorial Quilt, the symphony is a stitching of musical quotations and original melodies that memorialize Corigliano’s lost friends. In the score, the composer writes the name of each deceased person next to their specific melody to amplify this effect in print. After its premiere in Chicago, the symphony received another important performance by the New York Philharmonic in 1992 as a part of a concert series promoting awareness for HIV/AIDS.¹²

Another AIDS benefit concert performed in New York City called “Music for Life” predates the initial silence of the music industry. Featuring performances of classical music by the industry’s leading artists, the 1987 concert raised over \$1.7 million for the support and care of people living with AIDS.¹³ Despite the absence of any AIDS-related compositions on the program, the concert united classical musicians and patrons in solidarity for all those affected by the deadly epidemic. Dozens of additional benefit concerts around the United States continued to raise money for AIDS research and patient care throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

During the height of the AIDS epidemic in the mid-1990s, the National Flute Association of the United States (NFA) accepted a proposal for the creation of its own AIDS-related concert series to occur annually during the summer convention. George Pope, Emeritus Professor of Flute at the University of Akron, submitted the proposal in 1995 after losing many of his own friends and colleagues to the virus.¹⁴ The concert series was not a fundraiser like “Music for Life” and did not occur in a large concert hall. Rather, each “AIDS Memorial Concert” occurred

¹¹ Edward Rothstein, "Themes of AIDS and Remembrance in Corigliano's Symphony: AIDS and Remembrance in Corigliano's Symphony," *New York Times*, Jan 11, 1992, 9.

¹² Rothstein, “Corigliano’s Symphony,” 9.

¹³ Bernard Holland, "Concert: 'Music for Life,' a Benefit: [Review]," *New York Times*, Nov 09, 1987.

¹⁴ Bassett, “Collaboration and Catalyst,” 48–50.

in a small ballroom of the convention venue and allowed for the flute community to gather intimately for collective remembrance and healing. Attendance and participation at these concerts vary, but the more popular years feature eight to ten pieces of music on an hour-long concert. Upwards of fifty flutists come to listen and grieve. After a more inclusive name change to the “Concert of Remembrance and Healing” in 2000, this important event continues to help and heal the flute community at every annual convention.

During the first four years of the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series, six commissioned works of textless classical music premiered at these concerts. In order of premiere, the works include *Lux Aeterna: a meditation for flute and viola* by William Ferris, *Vocalise and Waltz* by Paul Basler, *Phoenix: for two flutes* by Robert Maggio, *...some measures for living: for flute and piano* by Roger Zahab, *Canticle* by Randall Snyder, and *Souvenir: for flute and piano* by Martin Kennedy. Each of these pieces respond directly to the AIDS crisis by memorializing someone who died of the disease or by conveying the composer’s experiences through nonverbal expression. This lecture-recital examines these AIDS-related works of classical chamber music and discusses the importance of both the music and the concert series within the history of the NFA and the AIDS epidemic.

Literature Review:

As previously stated, the scope of this lecture-recital is limited to purely instrumental music composed in reaction to the AIDS epidemic. It is no wonder that John Corigliano’s Symphony No. 1, the first classical symphony responding to AIDS, receives the most attention from scholars and critics. A *New York Times* review of the work’s premiere includes programmatic notes for each of the four movements while asserting that “esthetic coherence”

and “poignance” dominate the music.¹⁵ A later review of the New York Philharmonic’s performance of the symphony and a CD review of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra’s recording both agree with Corigliano’s own program notes on the work, echoing that “feelings of loss, anger, and frustration” permeate the piece in a riveting way.¹⁶ Scholarly research regarding the symphony surfaces in 1993 with a *Communication Studies* article by Sellnow, which examines the communicative potential of music void of lyrical content.¹⁷ The bulk of scholarly attention comes nearly a decade later within a 2007 dissertation by Tift and a 2013 *American Music* article by Bergman.¹⁸ Both of these sources discuss Corigliano’s personal experience of loss due to the AIDS crisis, connect the Symphony No. 1 to the AIDS Memorial Quilt, and provide theoretical analysis of the music.

Another piece of instrumental music discussed in current scholarship is Robert Savage’s “AIDS Ward Scherzo” for solo piano. While the title of this work clearly connects it to the composer’s own experience with AIDS, a dissertation by Ostermiller situates the piece within a musicological-semiotic framework in order to show how textless music can contain AIDS-related signifiers.¹⁹ The methodology utilized in Ostermiller’s research is very similar to Sellnow’s reading of the Corigliano Symphony No. 1. Aside from this semiotic discussion of “AIDS Ward Scherzo,” a recent *New York Times* article presents a discussion with Corigliano

¹⁵ John Rockwell, "Review/Music; Contemporary Anguish in Corigliano Symphony: [Review]," *New York Times*, Mar 18, 1990, 59.

¹⁶ Rothstein, "Corigliano’s Symphony,” 9; Schwarz, "A Symphony for the Age of AIDS,” 43.

¹⁷ Deanna Sellnow, "John Corigliano's 'Symphony no. 1' as a Communicative Medium," *Communication Studies* 44, no. 2 (1993): 87.

¹⁸ Tift, “Musical AIDS,” 49-98; Elizabeth Bergman, "Of Rage and Remembrance, Music and Memory: The Work of Mourning in John Corigliano’s Symphony No. 1 and Choral Chaconne," *American Music* 31, no. 3 (2013): 340-361.

¹⁹ Ostermiller, "Musical Responses to AIDS,” 1.

about several of his students who died of AIDS, including Savage.²⁰ According to Corigliano, Savage composed the piano solo while he was a patient at St. Vincent's Hospital in Manhattan. This information invites further examination of "AIDS Ward Scherzo" as absolute music that captures physical and emotional turmoil without words.

No scholarly literature discusses the instrumental flute music commissioned for the "AIDS Memorial Concert" series. The only appearance of the six pieces exists in a dissertation appendix compiled by Goodman in 2007.²¹ This appendix includes every piece premiered at the NFA conventions between 1973 and 2007, but it fails to include any additional programmatic information. In fact, the programs for the "AIDS Memorial Concert" series can only be found in physical copies of the convention books. The National Flute Association website omits digital archives of any convention books predating 2006.²² Therefore, my research will archive the "AIDS Memorial Concert" series and its commissioned works within the NFA's missing institutional history while also adding these six pieces of music to the scholarly discussion of AIDS-related instrumental music.

Methodology:

The methodology for this lecture-recital consists of identifying the commissioned works of the "AIDS Memorial Concert" series and interviewing coordinators, composers, performers, and audience members of the concert series in order to create a cohesive history.²³ I obtained

²⁰ Joshua Barone, "The Music Nearly Lost to AIDS," *New York Times*, May, 31, 2019.

²¹ Kimberlee Goodman, "The Commissioned Works of the National Flute Association for the Young Artist and High School Soloist Competitions" (DMA diss., Ohio State University, 2007), 86-99.

²² National Flute Association, "Past Convention Books," accessed April 9, 2021, <https://www.nfaonline.org/convention/convention-archives/past-convention-books>.

²³ A full list of interview questions is located in Appendix A.

physical copies of the NFA convention books from 1995 to 1999, which include the programs for each “AIDS Memorial Concert.” I identified six pieces of chamber music commissioned and premiered at these concerts. I will create a lecture-recital that presents the history of the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series and discusses each commissioned piece of chamber music with live performances of the six works.

In order to create a cohesive history of this concert series and of these commissioned works, the majority of my research will consist of interviews conducted via video call or phone call. First, I plan to interview George Pope about the genesis of the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series and ask him a series of questions about each of the six commissioned works. The questions will cover the nature of each commission, how each performer was selected to perform each work, and who attended each of the yearly concerts. Next, I will interview performers who premiered the works and audience members who attended the concerts. These interviews will add personal perspectives regarding the concert series and convey the emotional impact that the concerts had on those who attended. Finally, I will interview each living composer of the commissioned works.²⁴ The questions will center on experiences of personal loss during the AIDS crisis, how each of the works respond to AIDS, and specific dedications for each of the works. From this information, I will craft a presentation that highlights the music’s personal and historical importance within the AIDS crisis and the National Flute Association while reconstituting the music within the repertoire of textless classical music reacting to AIDS.

²⁴ William Ferris died in 2000. All other composers are still alive and will be interviewed.

Preliminary Findings:

An initial reading and analysis of all six commissioned works from the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series reveals unifying themes of memory, loss, and death within their titles and the music itself. The titles and dedications of *Lux Aeterna: a meditation for flute and viola* by William Ferris, *Phoenix: for two flutes* by Robert Maggio, and *...some measures for living: for flute and piano* by Roger Zahab connect these pieces to the stated themes through words alone. Additionally, all six pieces reflect the themes of memory, loss, and death through the music, although not in the same ways. *Vocalise and Waltz* by Paul Basler and *Souvenir: for flute and piano* by Martin Kennedy contain a stream of consonant melodies and harmonies, which create a calm and meditative soundscape. *Lux Aeterna: a meditation for flute and viola* by William Ferris and *Canticles* by Randall Snyder include more dissonant exchanges of notes to create atmospheres that sound angry or sorrowful. *Phoenix: for two flutes* by Robert Maggio and *...some measures for living: for flute and piano* by Roger Zahab encompass both consonant and dissonant elements to connect with the unifying themes in a more dynamic approach.

Lux Aeterna: a meditation for flute and viola by William Ferris was the first commissioned work of the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series. *Lux Aeterna* is the only piece of music which contains a written dedication by the composer on the score, which reads, “To the memory of all our friends, colleagues, and music-makers who have entered into The Fallen Life.”²⁵ The music that follows this dedication is laden with many tempo descriptions that evoke memory, including words such as “dreamily” and “mysteriously.” The interplay between the flute and viola parts remains harmonically unstable, moving through multiple minor keys and

²⁵ William Ferris, *Lux Aeterna: a meditation for flute and viola* (Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections and University Archives, Northwestern University. 1997), 1.

only finding resolution at the very end of long phrases. The listener is invited to search for the memories of those who have entered The Fallen Life through this wandering music.

Vocalise and Waltz by Paul Basler takes a much lighter tone in comparison to Ferris's piece. Written for flute and piano, this music features rhythmically active lines in both instrumental parts that begin and end in major keys. The flute's soaring melody evokes a happier recollection of those who have been lost to AIDS. During the waltz section, a brief shift to an unsettled, chromatic passage occurs towards the end, but the music returns to a hopeful sentiment shortly thereafter. Additionally, Basler indicates on the first page of the score that *Vocalise and Waltz* was "written for Eldred Spell."²⁶ I will ask Basler and Spell about the nature of this commission during their respective interviews.

The most well-known and performed of the six commissioned works, *Phoenix: for two flutes* by Robert Maggio, is an inventive and captivating composition. Movements titled "...consuming itself in fire..." and "...rising renewed from the ashes..." create a musical depiction of the death and rebirth of the fabled phoenix. The imagery unmistakably reflects the death of many people to AIDS, but the eventual rebirth of their lives through music and memory. Maggio's compositional approach is equal parts consonant and dissonant. At the end of the first movement, crazed minor-second runs between the two flutes signal that the bird has burst into flames. Throughout the entirety of the second movement, a slowly ascending and triumphant melodic line in each flute part culminates in a heroic and resilient feeling to end to the piece. Maggio composed this music specifically for the 4th annual "AIDS Memorial Concert" in 1998

²⁶ Paul Basler, *Vocalise and Waltz* (St. Augustine, FL: WaveFront Music, LLC, 1996), 1.

but neglects to include a dedication.²⁷ I will ask Maggio if a dedication exists during his interview.

...*some measures for living: for flute and piano* by Roger Zahab dawns a hesitant and sarcastic title, because the music expresses loss much more than life. The piece begins with a section marked *dolce*, although large intervallic leaps in both the flute and piano parts disrupt any sweet feeling of serenity. About halfway through the piece, a description of “fleeting time” accompanies a shift to a chaotic scherzo of notes that eventually fade into nothing. Additionally, on the cover page of the work, Zahab writes that the music was “commissioned by, written for, and dedicated to George Pope.”²⁸ I will ask Pope and Zahab more about the history of this commission during their respective interviews.

In comparison to the other commissioned works in consideration, *Canticle* by Randall Snyder suggests feelings of pain and anger the most. Written as a duet for two flutes, the parts move rapidly back and forth between rhythmic unison and perfect canon with one another. Throughout the music, the usage of dissonant chromaticism, eerie pitch bends, quarter tones, and extreme shifts in dynamics and tessitura poignantly express the pain of losing loved ones to AIDS. The piece concludes with both flutes blasting notes in the instrument’s third octave positioned a quarter tone apart from one another. Snyder dedicated the work to its commissioner, John Bailey.²⁹ I will ask Snyder and Bailey about the nature of the commission during their respective interviews.

²⁷ Robert Maggio, *Phoenix: for two flutes* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Presser, 1998), 1.

²⁸ Roger Zahab, *...some measures for living: for flute and piano* (Akron, Ohio: Roger Zahab, 1998), 1.

²⁹ Randall Snyder, *Canticle* (Randall Snyder Compositions, University of Nebraska Lincoln, 1998), 1.

The final commissioned work of the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series is *Souvenir: for flute and piano* by Martin Kennedy. I performed this piece last year at an event on World AIDS Day and felt instantly connected to the memory of those lost to the virus. The lush harmonies underneath the soaring flute part are reminiscent of the compositional techniques in Paul Basler’s *Vocalise and Waltz*. A consistently slow tempo with little fluctuation allows the listener to enter a state of mediation and remembrance. The last six measures of the piece are marked “distant,” and all rhythmic motion in the flute and piano comes to a halt by the final measure. At this point, a somber calmness washes over all those who are in the room. Kennedy only includes the title of the work on the cover page.³⁰ I will ask him if there is a proper dedication during his interview.

Outline:

1. Introduction and background (10 minutes)
 - a. Thesis
 - b. Brief history of HIV/AIDS
 - c. Classical music reactions to AIDS, mostly with text
 - d. Absence of scholarly literature regarding textless classical music
2. Methodology and Preliminary Findings (3 minutes)
 - a. Identified commissioned works for the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series
 - b. Conducted interviews with George Pope, composers, performers, and audience
 - c. General themes unifying the commissioned works
3. History and Performance of Commissioned Works (44 minutes)
 - a. Background for *Lux Aeterna* by William Ferris (2 minutes)

³⁰ Martin Kennedy, *Souvenir: for flute and piano* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Presser, 1999), 1.

- b. Performance of excerpt from *Lux Aeterna* by William Ferris (5 minutes)
 - c. Background for *Vocalise and Waltz* by Paul Basler (2 minutes)
 - d. Performance of *Vocalise and Waltz* by Paul Basler (6 minutes)
 - e. Background for *Phoenix* by Robert Maggio (2 minutes)
 - f. Performance of excerpt from *Phoenix* by Robert Maggio (5 minutes)
 - g. Background for *--some measures for living* by Roger Zahab (2 minutes)
 - h. Performance of *--some measures for living* by Roger Zahab (9 minutes)
 - i. Background for *Canticle* by Randall Snyder (2 minutes)
 - j. Performance of excerpt from *Canticle* by Randall Snyder (5 minutes)
 - k. Background for *Souvenir* by Martin Kennedy (2 minutes)
 - l. Performance of *Souvenir* by Martin Kennedy (4 minutes)
4. Conclusions (3 minutes)
- a. Importance/reconstitution of these works to the history of textless classical music responding to AIDS
 - b. Contribution to the NFA's undocumented institutional history

Lecture-Recital Slideshow and Script:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1uZnMFbLxaWbkjlBjA4RIfSNcNTTV7tPc/view?usp=share_link

Introduction

As we are all very aware, the COVID-19 pandemic is a global health crisis that we live alongside every day. However, many people are *not* aware that the HIV and AIDS epidemic, which began in the United States in the 1980s, is also a global health crisis that we live

alongside every day. The loss of human life from both diseases has triggered artistic responses from nearly every creative discipline. Music is certainly no exception.

In April 2017, I staged a recital at the end of my undergraduate degree that consisted of works for the flute written by five gay composers. One of those pieces was *Phoenix for two flutes* by Robert Maggio. The dedication of the piece reads: Commissioned for the 1998 “AIDS Memorial Concert” of the National Flute Association. I eventually discovered that my formative flute teacher, George Pope, had started this concert series in 1995 and had commissioned composers to write several pieces of music throughout the years, including *Phoenix*, to be premiered during this concert series. Why I had not heard of this concert series sooner was unbeknownst to me.

Problem and Thesis

After examining the National Flute Association’s website, I quickly realized that the program books containing the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series programs predate the current archives. There was essentially no trace of the concert series or its commissioned works. A broader search for instrumental music written in response to the AIDS crisis revealed that current scholarship neglects this genre in favor of vocal music and other art forms.

I argue that studying and performing the commissioned flute music of the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series fills a noticeable gap in research about AIDS-related instrumental music while also demonstrating the importance of such music and concerts as conduits for remembrance and healing.

Background and Literature Review

The AIDS epidemic began quietly on June 5, 1981 when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced the first cases of the acquired immunodeficiency disease, abbreviated as AIDS, in the United States. After only a decade, AIDS infected more than 200,000 in the US and took 100,000 of those lives. The number of infections and deaths continued to soar throughout the early 1990s.

Musical reactions to AIDS surfaced in the 1990s after a delayed response to the epidemic. The majority of music creation happened in the genres of pop and rock. Broadway broke its silence with the “rock musical” *Rent* in 1996, which contains multiple HIV-positive characters who sing about their social and personal experiences with the virus. Perhaps the most successful music project was the *AIDS Quilt Songbook* of 1992, a collection of eighteen songs written by eighteen different composers that address HIV/AIDS either directly or metaphorically. It was inspired by the national AIDS Memorial Quilt, a 54-ton tapestry that memorialized 110,000 victims of AIDS.

Classical composers did create some music without lyrics in reaction to AIDS. The first major work to take AIDS as its central theme was John Corigliano’s Symphony No. 1, written in 1990 as a commission for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra’s centennial celebration. In the notes about the symphony, Corigliano writes that he experienced “feelings of loss, anger, and frustration” for friends and colleagues who died of AIDS. Inspired by the AIDS Memorial Quilt, the symphony is a stitching of musical quotations and original melodies that memorialize Corigliano’s lost friends. The symphony receives the most attention from scholars and critics, including multiple classical music reviews from the *New York Times*, a 1993 *Communication Studies* research article by Deanna Sellnow, a 2007 dissertation by Matthew Tift, and a 2013 article by Elizabeth Bergman.

Another piece of instrumental music discussed in current scholarship is Robert Savage's "AIDS Ward Scherzo" for solo piano. While the title of this work clearly connects it to the composer's own experience with AIDS, a 2015 dissertation by Marcus Ostermiller situates the piece within a musicological-semiotic framework in order to show how textless music can contain AIDS-related signifiers. Most recently, a 2019 *New York Times* article presents a discussion with John Corigliano about several of his students who died of AIDS, including Robert Savage.

No scholarly literature discusses the instrumental flute music commissioned for the "AIDS Memorial Concert" series. The National Flute Association website omits digital archives of any convention books predating 2006. Therefore, my research archives the "AIDS Memorial Concert" series and its commissioned works within the NFA's missing institutional history while also adding these pieces of music to the scholarly discussion of AIDS-related instrumental music.

Methodology and Preliminary Findings

The methodology for this lecture-recital consisted of two steps: identifying the commissioned works of the "AIDS Memorial Concert" series and interviewing the coordinator, composers, performers, and audience members of the concert series.

Thanks to George Pope, I obtained physical copies of the NFA convention books from 1995 to 1998, which include the programs for each "AIDS Memorial Concert." These programs immediately revealed several pieces of music that were commissioned for the concert series.

The majority of my research consisted of interviews conducted via video call or email. In total, I conducted 13 interviews with composers, performers, audience members, and the concert

coordinator. Consent was obtained prior to conducting each interview, and the same pre-determined interview questions were used for each interviewee.

Through the acquisition of the program books and completion of the interview process, I was able to construct a presentation that highlights the personal and historical importance of this music while intentionally reconstituting the works within the repertoire of textless classical music written in response to the AIDS epidemic.

New Findings and Clarifications

As previously stated, I conducted interviews with 13 individuals as a part of my research. Through these interviews, it became clear that the National Flute Association's archival history was even messier than I first imagined. Of the pieces marked as commissions on the programs, one piece was not a commission at all, and several others were not related to AIDS. This new information affected my research in the following ways.

Composer Martin Kennedy's piece titled *Souvenir* was mismarked as a commission on the 1998 "AIDS Memorial Concert." In conversation with the composer, I learned that his piece *Four Songs for flute and piano* was commissioned by flutist Thomas Robertello in 1998 for this concert series. While both pieces are beautiful works for flute and piano, neither piece is programmatically about AIDS and therefore are excluded from this lecture-recital.

Composer Paul Basler was commissioned by the late flutist Eldred Spell to write a piece titled *Vocalise-Waltz* for the 1997 "AIDS Memorial Concert." However, the composer was quick to admit that *Vocalise-Waltz* has nothing to do with AIDS whereas several of his other works for flute focus solely on this topic. One such piece is his *Sonata for flute and piano* written in 1991

and performed on the 1995 “AIDS Memorial Concert.” I will present a movement from this work instead of *Vocalise-Waltz*.

Last but certainly not least, I was able to unearth two unmarked commissions from this concert series: *Short Suite for flute and dancer* by Paul Ferguson and *All the Words to All the Songs* by Dan Welcher. This is why we do research folks! I am thrilled to share both AIDS-related pieces with you today.

In total, I identified seven AIDS-related pieces of flute music to present during this lecture-recital. An analysis of each piece and the interviews conducted as a part of this research revealed unifying themes of memory, loss, and death throughout these works.

Short Suite for flute and dancer by Paul Ferguson

In chronological order of appearance during the concert series, we begin with *Short Suite for flute and dancer* by Paul Ferguson, who is both a composer and Cleveland, Ohio jazz legend. This piece was commissioned by the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series organizer, George Pope, and flutist Mary Kay Robinson in 1995. It was performed by Robinson on flute and Pope as the dancer. The piece is dedicated to the memory of Andrew Coburn, a long-time clarinetist of the Akron Symphony Orchestra and a dear friend to Pope and Robinson.

Due to time constraints, I will only perform the second movement of this jazzy suite, titled “Blues.” This chromatically unstable movement begins with a statement of the triplet-rhythm theme and moves through a passionate 16th-note variation, all while evoking a sad and somber mood. While I do not have George here to dance with me, you can imagine the kinds of movements he would have choreographed to compliment this bluesy lament.

Sonata for flute and piano by Paul Basler

Paul Basler, a composer and horn player residing in Florida, was deeply affected by the AIDS crisis. In our email correspondence, he wrote to me that “the early years of the epidemic were horrific” and that fear of the virus consumed the gay community in addition to the grief experienced from loved ones who were lost. His *Sonata for flute and piano* is a direct reflection of those dark times, with “a great deal of anger, pain, and sorrow in the work.” Flutist Eldred Spell and pianist Lillian Pearson performed this piece on the 1995 “AIDS Memorial Concert.”

Perhaps the most poignant movement of this work is the second, titled “Elegy (Loss of Innocence).” The 1995 program book includes a dedication to the memory of Eli Thomas, Jr., a close friend of Basler’s during his time at Florida State University from 1984 to 1985. After relocating to western North Carolina, the death of Eli and feelings of isolation catalyzed Basler’s creation of the flute sonata. The second movement stands as a beautiful memorial for Eli Thomas, Jr. and all those who have been lost to AIDS.

All the Words to All the Songs by Dan Welcher

The initial 1995 “AIDS Memorial Concert” laid the foundation for additional years of concerts and commissioned pieces. In 1996, flutist Nancy Andrew commissioned composer Dan Welcher to write a piece dedicated to the memory of their mutual friend, Vinson Hammond. Andrew premiered the piece on the 1995 “AIDS Memorial Concert” with pianist Bari Mort.

Vinson Hammond was the collaborative pianist for legendary flutist James Galway for many years and taught at the Aspen Music Festival, where he met Welcher and Andrew. After Hammond’s untimely death to AIDS in 1992, Welcher says that he was honored to write a piece that was a picture of Hammond’s life. The piece quotes “Can’t Help Falling in Love” by Elvis

Presley, who was Hammond's musical idol. The title of the work was previously "Music for Vinson" but its published title is due to the following story.

Ahead of a performance on NBC's "Today" show with James Galway, Hammond was asked if he knew the words to the John Denver song they were about to play. Vinson looked directly into the camera, and in his best Alabama drawl declared "I know all the words to all the songs." Much like the melodies in John Corigliano's Symphony No. 1, the quotes from this famous Elvis song memorialize Vison Hammond throughout this "spiritual benediction."

Lux Aeterna by William Ferris

For the 1997 "AIDS Memorial Concert," flutist Donald Peck, principal flutist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at that time, commissioned composer William Ferris to write a duet for flute and viola in remembrance of friends who had died from the virus. Titled *Lux Aeterna*, which translates from Latin to "Eternal Light," the piece was premiered by one of Peck's students, Jason Bladzick and assistant principal viola of the Chicago Lyric Opera, Terri Van Valkinburgh.

William Ferris wrote a pointed dedication about death on the manuscript of his duet. It reads "to the memory of all our friends, colleagues, and music-makers who have entered into The Fallen Life." The music that follows this dedication is laden with many tempo descriptions that evoke memory, including words such as "dreamily" and "mysteriously." The interplay between the flute and viola parts remains harmonically unstable, moving through multiple minor keys and only finding resolution at the very end of long phrases. The listener is invited to search for the memories of those who have entered The Fallen Life through this wandering music.

Canticle by Randall Snyder

The 1998 “AIDS Memorial Concert” contained three newly commissioned works. The first of these was *Canticle* by Randall Snyder, written at the request of flutist John Bailey, a friend and fellow professor at the University of Nebraska Lincoln. John Bailey premiered the duet along with flutist Leonard Garrison. A dedication that reads “for the victims of AIDS” leaves no doubt in one’s mind about the seriousness of the piece.

In comparison to the other commissioned works, *Canticle* unmistakably evokes feelings of pain and loss. The flute parts move between perfect canon and rhythmic unison with one another, a compositional element which Snyder uses to symbolize “a sick person trying to break away from their fate.” Dissonant chromaticism, eerie pitch bends, quarter tones, and extreme shifts in dynamics and tessitura poignantly add to the emotion of the piece. After the blasting of third-register quarter tone dissonances, a coda suggests the subject’s final resignation to AIDS.

...some measures for living by Roger Zahab

...some measures for living by Roger Zahab was commissioned by, written for, and dedicated to the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series organizer, George Pope. Zahab and Pope met at the University of Akron in 1978 and both experienced the loss of loved ones to AIDS. *...some measures for living* was performed on the 1998 concert by flutist Karl Barton and pianist Gail Novak, although George Pope and pianist Eric Charnofsky would later record the work on a CD titled after the piece.

Zahab states that “one really has to live in the moment” when performing this piece. He is correct. The piece begins with a section marked *dolce*, although large intervallic leaps and rhythmic ambiguities in both the flute and piano parts disrupt any sweet feeling of serenity. About halfway through the piece, a description of “fleeting time” accompanies a shift to a

chaotic scherzo of notes that eventually fade into nothing. The music is a playful homage to the lives once lived by the victims of AIDS.

Phoenix by Robert Maggio

Last but certainly not least, *Phoenix* by Robert Maggio was commissioned in 1998 by George Pope and performed by flutist Nancy Andrew and Katie DeJongh. Maggio worked with both Andrew and DeJongh on several drafts of the piece, eventually arriving at a composition that is challenging, inventive, and, as Maggio had to say, “hugely cathartic.”

Movements titled “...consuming itself in fire...” and “...rising renewed from the ashes...” create a musical depiction of the death and rebirth of the fabled phoenix. The imagery unmistakably reflects the death of many people to AIDS, but the eventual rebirth of their lives through music and memory. At the end of the first movement, dissonant minor-second runs between the two flutes signal that the bird has burst into flames. Throughout the entirety of the second movement, a slowly ascending and triumphant melodic line in each flute part depicts the rebirth and culminates in a heroic and resilient resolution to the piece.

Conclusion

In conclusion, uncovering and performing this chamber music closes a noticeable gap in research about AIDS-related instrumental music, a genre that served as an important conduit for remembrance and healing during the AIDS crisis. Furthermore, this research helps to repair the National Flute Association’s missing institutional history regarding the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series and reconstitutes these important works into the current flute repertory with historical context.

While AIDS did not discriminate against who it touched, the virus disproportionately affected the lives of LGBTQ+ people. Therefore, this research topic holds particular importance to me as a gay man and to many other LGBTQ+ musicians, historians, and community members. I uncovered much more interpersonal history between the composers, instrumentalists, and audience members than I could contain in this lecture-recital. I plan to continue my research and eventually publish scholarly documents, or even a book, about the history of the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series and hopefully produce an album of the works commissioned for it.

Finally, I need to say a quick but sincere thanks to all those who made this lecture-recital possible. To my friends and family, both here and online, for your unending support. To my committee, Professor McGill, Dr. Verbeck, and Dr. Gamboa for seeing the importance of this research. To Chiaoyu Lin, Cristian Días, and Anne Leutkenhaus for your artistry and willingness to collaborate. To the 13 composers, performers, and audience members of the concert series who graciously offered their time for interviews. And to George Pope, my formative teacher and dear friend, for the creation of the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series and all that it has meant and will mean to our community for generations to come.

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Appendix A:

Interview Questions for Concert Coordinator, George Pope

1. How long have you been involved with the National Flute Association?
2. Do you have colleagues, family, or friends who were affected by the AIDS crisis? How were you personally affected by the AIDS crisis?
3. What prompted you to propose the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series in 1995?
4. You commissioned Roger Zahab to write *...some measures for living* in 1998. How did you meet the composer and why did you select him for the commission?
5. Of the 5 other composers who wrote works for this concert series, how did they find out about the concert series? Did you know any of the composers before the premiere of each work on the concert series?
6. How were the performers for each commissioned piece selected?
7. How was concert attendance throughout the 5 years of the concert series? Who typically attended the concert? What was the atmosphere of the event?
8. Why did the name of the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series change to the “Concert of Remembrance and Healing” series in 2000?
9. Have you kept in contact with any of the composers, performers, and/or audience members who attended the concert series?

Interview Questions for Commissioned Composers

1. Were you previously associated with the National Flute Association before the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series?

2. Do you have colleagues, family, or friends who were affected by the AIDS crisis? How were you personally affected by the AIDS crisis?
3. Had you previously written any pieces of music about the AIDS crisis or more generally about the LGBTQ+ community before this concert series?
4. Did you attend the performance of your work at the NFA association? If so, who else attended? What was the atmosphere of the event?
5. Who commissioned your piece of music, and is there a formal dedication?³¹
6. Did you know the musicians who performed your piece prior to the beginning of the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series?
7. Did composing this piece of music hold personal significance for you?
8. Have you kept in contact with any of the composers, performers, and/or audience members who attended the concert series?

Interview Questions for Performers

1. Were you previously associated with the National Flute Association before the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series?
2. Do you have colleagues, family, or friends who were affected by the AIDS crisis? How were you personally affected by the AIDS crisis?
3. Had you previously performed any pieces of music about the AIDS crisis or more generally about the LGBTQ+ community before this concert series?
4. Do you recall who attended the concert? What was the atmosphere of the event?
5. Did performing at this concert series hold personal significance for you?

³¹ Only ask this question if the name of the commissioner and a dedication is missing.

6. Have you kept in contact with any of the composers, other performers, and/or audience members who attended the concert series?

Interview Questions for Audience Members

1. Were you previously associated with the National Flute Association before the “AIDS Memorial Concert” series?
2. Do you have colleagues, family, or friends who were affected by the AIDS crisis? How were you personally affected by the AIDS crisis?
3. How did the concert make you feel? What was the atmosphere of the event?
4. Did you know any of the composers or performers before the concert series?
5. Have you kept in contact with any of the composers, performers, and/or audience members who attended the concert series?