

PROGRAM NOTE for TRAIN OF THOUGHT  
Alex Shapiro, composer  
2015

A year before this piece was even imagined, my Vermont composer friend Dennis Bathory-Kitsz happened to post a short video on Facebook of a neighborhood Amtrak train zipping past his lens and microphone at full speed. There was something hauntingly beautiful about the particular chords and rhythms of that moment, and after replaying the clip several times I sensed that maybe sometime in the future, I could make use of these evocative sounds. I asked Dennis to return to the edge of the tracks and collect more audio samples. After cataloguing the pitches and patterns so I could work with them as musical elements, I tucked the edited files away, for an unknown project.

That project appeared the next year, in the form of a commission from band director and educator Paul Kile for the Cochran Chamber Commissioning Project. They requested a work for a small group of any instruments commonly found in a wind band. Being the underdog-loving gal that I am, rather than include the usual all-stars of flute, clarinet or trumpet, I chose six, much lower-register instruments which deserve more repertoire. And, instead of taking a traditional approach to band instruments which tends— in my own works as well— to enjoy fast and remarkably loud notes whenever possible, I decided to offer these musicians the challenge of playing something moody, slower, and often quiet. The sound of a train summons many different emotions, from anticipation, to regret. Recalling the files I had previously edited, I knew the timbre of this ensemble would be the perfect match.

As it turns out, TRAIN OF THOUGHT is very effective with many types of instrumental groups— all brass, all woodwind, etc. But its first trip down the tracks was scored for bass clarinet, baritone saxophone, French horn, trombone, euphonium, and tuba, and I dedicate the piece to all the heroes of the low-pitched world!