

DAVID AVSHALOMOV
ELEGY for String Orchestra (1990)

This work grew out of its soulful opening melody, arching up, gently falling down. It has five sections. The first (in A minor) spins out the tune in the first violins (who carry the melodic thread for most of the piece), gradually adding accompaniment, cadencing on a “farewell” harmony, then repeating. The second is a solemn chorale in the lower strings, turning to A major. The third is a high sweet melody in first violins (memories and hope), becoming more impassioned in a second section, under a pulsing accompaniment. The fourth is an unexpected slow blues-y “stomp,” hitting deliberate “sour” notes and adding mildly jazzy harmonies in the plucked accompaniment, building, climaxing, relaxing. (This shift has been described by listeners as “Mahler meets Cab Callaway.”) The fifth re-works the opening, now more bitterly harmonized, reaching a “death” chord, then repeating the “farewell” cadence. It closes with several plangent phrases echoing the opening motif of the piece. The first violins are left hanging high above a deep bass note, then the inner parts complete a sweet harmony of acceptance, fading away.

(Elegy is dedicated to the memory of Leonard Bernstein, whose career was a beacon for young American conductors and composers. It has on specific occasions been performed in memory of others, including the composer’s paternal grandfather, Aaron Avshalomoff.)