

grew up and as she wound down her job with the Geological Survey, she now plays viol with Los Angeles Baroque.

A few years ago on YouTube she heard a piece of music that simply transcribed rising global temperatures into notes. “It wasn’t music, but it was, you know, interesting,” she says. The idea inspired her to use similar data to compose something with more musical heft.

It took her several years to complete. “The last time I actually composed a piece was in college,” Jones says. “I did take a theory class in college.”

The result is *In Nomine Terra Calens* — “In the Name of a Warming Earth” — which is based on average global temperatures since the 1880s. It’s written in a 16th-century English musical form — called “*in nomine*” — for several stringed instruments, usually viols; in it, one instrument plays a foundation theme, around which the others play polyphony.

Jones uses historical climate data for that foundation theme, resulting in a pitch that rises faster and faster throughout the seven-minute composition. By the end, she says, the notes are so high they’re difficult to play.

“This data is like a graceful minuet accelerating into a frantic jig,” she notes on her website.

In February Jones and other members of L.A. Baroque performed *In Nomine Terra Calens* at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. She also worked with an animator to create a visual depiction of the climate data to go with her music on YouTube, where it’s received 30,000 views since it was posted May 15.

This, Jones says, is art sending a message that’s loud and clear.

“I don’t understand why people aren’t more terrified by what’s going on,” she says. “We should be talking about restoring our world, and we’re just like putting our heads in the sand.”

An Apocalyptic Genre

Malheur Symphony and *In Nomine Terra Calens* mark just two data points in a growing wave of new music being created in recent years, says Robert Kyr, a professor of composition and theory at the University of Oregon School of Music and Dance.

“More and more composers are feeling called,” Kyr says, adding that he uses the term “called,” with its religious overtones, decidedly. “We need to awaken to new possibilities of understanding our relationship with the natural world and our obligation to serve as the very best stewards of our incredible environments and our incredible planet.”

Perhaps the most noted composer in this vein has been Seattle’s John Luther Adams, who for years has incorporated natural sounds into his environmentally oriented compositions. His orchestral work *Become Ocean*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in music in 2014, draws its title from a poem by composer John Cage.

“Life on this Earth first emerged from the sea,” Ad-



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— Lucy Jones

ams explains in a program note. “As the polar ice melts and sea level rises, we humans find ourselves facing the prospect that once again we may quite literally become ocean.”

Kyr — who was a professor of Thomas’ when the younger composer studied at the UO — has created his own works with a climate theme.

His 2007 *A Time for Life: An environmental oratorio* was commissioned and recorded by Portland vocal ensemble Cappella Romana. Divided into three parts — “Creation,” “Forgetting” and “Remembering” — the work weaves in sources from a Native American prayer to a 1961 “Service for the Environment” written by an Eastern Orthodox monk at Mount Athos monastery in Greece.

“Music can reach people at levels that perhaps nothing else can,” Kyr says. “And so as composers, we have a particular obligation to use our musical gifts to address these issues and to impel people to take action.”

Birdcalls from a Desert Marsh

By all accounts, *Malheur Symphony* was an unqualified success at its May 5 premiere in Burns.

“It was a nice way to reclaim that space,” Keim said of hearing Thomas’ music in the high school gym, which had been the scene of a contentious community meeting during the takeover.

“The goal was accomplished,” agreed Burns music teacher Marianne Andrews, who was also there. “They didn’t dwell. The people of Harney County are done discussing it. But they were thrilled with the beauty of the symphony.”

Though I missed that premiere performance in Burns, I was able to hear *Malheur Symphony* at one of three performances later given by the Central Oregon Symphony in Bend.

I’ve been going to Malheur Refuge for three decades, often visiting three or four times a year with my son, Noah Strycker. We both feel a deep connection to the place and the community around it, and he joined me at the concert.

I was, I will say, apprehensive as the music began. Contemporary classical music has a well-deserved reputation for being inaccessible to mere musical mortals.

But from its quiet opening, Thomas’ symphony was not only warm and listenable but also smart and complex. The entire audience — which nearly filled Bend High School auditorium on a Monday night — was rapt for the full half-hour the symphony takes to perform.

As the music died down, before the applause erupted, my son looked over at me. A birder, he’d been listening not only to the music, but also to the birdcalls Thomas had woven into it, including a marsh bird called a sora.

“I’ve never heard a symphony with a sora,” Noah said. “It felt like being at Page Springs Campground on a morning in June. He got it.” ■



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