

# *Vestida de Luto*

DRAPED IN MOURNING BLACK

**Aldo Rafael Forte**

*Composer*

***Vestida de Luto*** is a tone poem for band of about 14 minutes in duration. The Spanish title of the work translates roughly into “draped in mourning black” since the composition is inspired by the image of the black clad “old world widows” donning black veils indefinitely after the passing of their spouses. ***Vestida de Luto*** was commissioned by and is dedicated “to Jack Stamp and the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Wind Ensemble”. I am delighted to compose this work for this wonderful group of musicians who three years ago recorded my energetic and quick paced composition *SYNERGY - Concerto for Band*.

The idea for ***Vestida de Luto*** transpired during a conversation that Jack and I had in Richmond, VA in 1997. After asking me to compose a work for his ensemble we discussed possible “scenarios” for the piece. *SYNERGY* is an energetic work throughout in a fast tempo. Jack suggested that I explore the idea of composing a work which would be imbued with “slow” relentless energy. Thus, the beat units in ***Vestida de Luto*** are all “slow” with no tempo exceeding M.M. 96.

The entire tone poem depicts various aspects of death and dying in the tradition of such works as *Tod und Verklarung* by Richard Strauss. The programmatic ideas were chosen only for their dramatic possibilities and in no way reflect any specific preference for any religious philosophy.

The main thematic, rhythmic, and harmonic ideas for the work are revealed in roughly in the first 34 measures of the piece. There is a dichotomy between Cb Major and Bb minor on and off throughout the work. Furthermore, major and minor thirds as well as the melodic seconds which outline the thirds are the primary building blocks of the composition.

***Vestida de Luto*** is cast in three contrasting sections:

<i>Section I.</i>	<i>The struggle of the dying</i> (heavily scored)	M. 1 - 78
<i>Section II</i>	<i>Romantic depictions after death</i> (lightly scored)	M. 79 - 199
<i>Section III</i>	<i>Rejoicing, the “freeing” of the soul</i> (mostly heavily scored)	M. 200 - end

*Section I.* The work opens with the “fate” theme in the low brass which immediately sets up the Cb Bb dichotomy and outlines the intervals of thirds. Soon afterward tense music driven by dotted rhythms in the lows on an A pedal (M. 9 - 13) representing *death* begins to contrast with lively and bright music (M. 14 - 17) cast in 5/8, 6/8, 7/8 ect. representing *life* symbolizing the struggle of the dying to hang on to life. This interplay continues but soon even the 5/8, 6/8 music becomes more tense (M. 34) as tritones become more prevalent. The evolving Cb Major tonality over an A pedal (M. 49 - 55) eventually climaxes on Bb minor (M.56). All these tonal/emotional conflicts build, culminating with death overtaking life after a tense tutti chord under a fermata (M.78).

*Section II.* This section evokes a variety of moods using more sparsely orchestrated textures. The moods are as follows:

*spiritual* (M. 81 - 100) Beginning with a choir of trombones, chordal and modal music “bouncing off” different textures.

*mysterious* (M. 101 - 120) Sustained tenuto melodies over modal accompaniment.

*grieving* (M.121 - 149) Expressive solos for clarinet, flute, trumpet, and horn give way to an impassioned tutti outburst all propelled by sixteenth note figurations.

*mysterious* (150 - 199) Faster and pressing forward, this “mood” begins with an “ostinato” introduced by two bassoons and later taken up by others. The “mysterious” mood is heightened by lugubrious passages for muted brass. Eventually the “ostinato” returns and the music builds in volume to the last section.

*Section III.* Suddenly the brass sound fanfares on Bb minor and Cb major (M. 200). Soon the music becomes jubilant and the previously restricted lively 5/8, 6/8 feel from section I. is allowed to take over and develop “rejoicing in the freeing of the soul” (M. 215 - 258). All previously tense music is now harmonically imbued with a “sunny disposition” including the dotted rhythm *death* motif (M. 259). Other themes are recalled and the texture begins to thin out. A “trilling” lonely solo flute toward the end of the work symbolizes the “floating” of the soul in a “tip of the hat” to Richard Strauss in the last song of his *Vier Letzte Lieder*. After one last crescendo, the work ends peacefully in Gb major with the solo flute above the lightly scored texture.

***Vestida de Luto*** is scored for standard American symphonic band instrumentation. As with all my band works, the percussion is scored with the idea of having one player on each part. The player performing the Percussion 3. part should place a suspended cymbal next to the four tom toms.

***Aldo Rafael Forte***, Composer, August 2001

