

JOHN MACKKEY

# Hymn to a Blue Hour

For Symphonic Brass / 2012, 2022

Commissioned by the brass of the San Francisco Symphony

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[www.johnmackkey.com](http://www.johnmackkey.com)



## **Instrumentation**

2 Trumpets in C

Flugelhorn

4 Horns

2 Tenor Trombones

Bass Trombone

Tuba

Bass Drum

The original wind ensemble version of “Hymn to a Blue Hour” was commissioned by Mesa State College. This version for symphonic brass was commissioned by the brass of the San Francisco Symphony. It received its world premiere on March 6, 2022, with the San Francisco Symphony brass and percussion, conducted by Brad Hogarth, at Davies Hall, San Francisco, California.

## Program Note

The blue hour is an oft-poeticized moment of the day – a lingering twilight that halos the sky after sundown but before complete darkness sets in. It is a time of day known for its romantic, spiritual, and ethereal connotations, and this magical moment has frequently inspired artists to attempt to capture its remarkable essence. This is the same essence that inhabits the sonic world of John Mackey's Hymn to a Blue Hour.

Programmatic content aside, the title itself contains two strongly suggestive implications – first, the notion of hymnody, which implies a transcendent and perhaps even sacred tone; and second, the color blue, which has an inexorable tie to American music. Certainly Hymn to a Blue Hour is not directly influenced by the blues, per se, but there is frequently throughout the piece a sense of nostalgic remorse and longing – an overwhelming sadness that is the same as the typically morose jazz form. Blue also has a strong affiliation with nobility, authority, and calmness. All of these notions are woven into the fabric of the piece – perhaps a result of Mackey using what was, for him, an unconventional compositional method:

“I almost never write music ‘at the piano’ because I don’t have any piano technique. I can find chords, but I play piano like a bad typist types: badly. If I write the music using an instrument where I can barely get by, the result will be very different than if I sit at the computer and just throw a zillion notes at my sample library, all of which will be executed perfectly and at any dynamic level I ask. We spent the summer at an apartment in New York that had a nice upright piano. I didn’t have a piano at home at the time – only a digital keyboard – and it was very different to sit and write at a real piano with real pedals and a real action, and to do so in the middle of one of the most exciting and energetic (and loud) cities in America. The result – partially thanks to my lack of piano technique, and partially, I suspect, from a subconscious need to balance the noise and relentless energy of the city surrounding me at the time – is much simpler and lyrical music than I typically write.”

Though not composed as a companion work to his earlier *Aurora Awakes*, Hymn to a Blue Hour strikes at many of the same chords, only in a sort of programmatic inversion. While *Aurora Awakes* deals with the emergence of light from darkness, Hymn to a Blue Hour is thematically linked to the moments just after sundown – perhaps even representing the same moment a half a world away. The opening slow section of *Aurora Awakes* does share some similar harmonic content, and the yearning within the melodic brushstrokes seem to be cast in the same light.

The piece is composed largely from three recurring motives – first, a cascade of falling thirds; second, a stepwise descent that provides a musical sigh; and third, the descent's reverse: an ascent that imbues hopeful optimism. From the basic framework of these motives stated at the outset of the work, a beautiful solo emerges from the flugelhorn – creating a texture spun together into a pillowy blanket of sound, reminiscent of similar constructions elicited by great American melodists of the 20th century, such as Samuel Barber. This melody superimposes a sensation of joy over the otherwise “blue” emotive context – a melodic line that over a long period of time spins the work to a point of catharsis. In this climactic moment, the colors are at their brightest, enveloping their surroundings with an angelic glow. Alas, as is the case with the magical blue hour, the moment cannot last for long, and just as steadily as they arrived, the colors dissipate into the encroaching darkness, eventually succumbing at the work's conclusion with a sense of peaceful repose.

Program note by Jake Wallace

Please credit Jake Wallace when reproducing or excerpting this program note

# Hymn to a Blue Hour

for Brad Hogarth

John Mackey

♩=60 circa, but extremely freely

C Trumpet 1

C Trumpet 2

Flugelhorn

Horn 1

Horn 2

Horn 3

Horn 4

Trombone 1

Trombone 2

Bass Trombone

Tuba

Bass Drum

8

Tpt. 1

Tpt. 2

Flugl.

Horn 1

Horn 2

Horn 3

Horn 4

Tbn. 1

Tbn. 2

Bs. Trb.

Tuba

BD

14

Musical score for measures 14-19. The score includes parts for Tpt. 1, Tpt. 2, Flugl., Horn 1-4, Tbn. 1-2, Bs. Trb., Tuba, and BD. Measure 14 starts with a tempo of quarter note = 72. The key signature has two flats. The score features various dynamics (mp, p, pp) and articulation marks. Time signatures change from 4/4 to 3/2 and back to 4/4. A large watermark 'WWW.JOHNMURKHEY.COM' is visible across the page.

20 **A** ♩=72

Musical score for measures 20-24. The score includes parts for Tpt. 1, Tpt. 2, Flugl., Horn 1-4, Tbn. 1-2, Bs. Trb., Tuba, and BD. Measure 20 starts with a tempo of quarter note = 72. The key signature has two flats. The score features various dynamics (mp, p, pp) and articulation marks. Time signatures change from 3/4 to 2/4 and back to 4/4. A large watermark 'WWW.JOHNMURKHEY.COM' is visible across the page.

B

*poco rit.*

28

Score for Section B (measures 28-34). The score includes parts for Tpt. 1, Tpt. 2, Flugl., Horn 1-4, Tbn. 1-2, Bs. Trb., Tuba, and BD. The key signature is B-flat major. The time signature changes from 2/4 to 4/4, then 5/4, 3/4, and back to 4/4. Dynamics include *mp*, *p*, *pp*, and *poco rit.*

C

*a tempo*

35

Score for Section C (measures 35-41). The score includes parts for Tpt. 1, Tpt. 2, Flugl., Horn 1-4, Tbn. 1-2, Bs. Trb., Tuba, and BD. The key signature is B-flat major. The time signature is 2/4. Dynamics include *mp*, *p*, *pp*, and *a tempo*.

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44 D rit.

Musical score for measures 44-51. The score includes parts for Tpt. 1, Tpt. 2, Flugl., Horn 1-4, Tbn. 1-2, Bs. Trb., Tuba, and BD. The key signature is B-flat major. The time signature changes from 2/4 to 4/4 at measure 45. Dynamics include *mf*, *mp*, *p*, and *mf*. A *rit.* marking is present at the end of the section.

52 E *a tempo* F ♩=104, ♪=52 circa

Musical score for measures 52-59. The score includes parts for Tpt. 1, Tpt. 2, Flugl., Horn 1-4, Tbn. 1-2, Bs. Trb., Tuba, and BD. The key signature is B-flat major. The time signature changes to 3/2 at measure 53. Dynamics include *p*, *pp*, and *mp*. Performance instructions include "stagger breathe" for Horn 3 and Horn 4. A *rit.* marking is present at the beginning of measure 52.



G  $\text{♩} = 60$  circa

with more motion,  $\text{♩} = 56$  circa poco accel.

61

Tpt. 1 *mp* *mf* *mp*

Tpt. 2 *mp* *mf*

Flugl. *p* *mp* *mf* *p*

Horn 1 *mp* *mf* *p*

Horn 2 *mp* *mf* *p*

Horn 3 *mp* *mf* *p*

Horn 4 *mp* *mf* *p*

Tbn. 1 *mf*

Tbn. 2 *mp* *mf*

Bs. Trb. *mp* *mf*

Tuba *mp* *mf*

BD *mf*

2/2 3/2 2/2 3/2

68

Tpt. 1 *mf* *f*

Tpt. 2 *mp* *mf* *f*

Flugl. *mp* *f*

Horn 1 *mf* *f*

Horn 2 *mf* *f*

Horn 3 *mp* *f*

Horn 4 *mf* *f*

Tbn. 1 *mp* *f*

Tbn. 2 *mp* *f*

Bs. Trb. *mp* *f*

Tuba *mp* *f*

BD *mp* *f*

2/2 3/2 3/4 3/4

poco rit.



73 **H** ♩=92 *poco rit.* *a tempo*

Tpt. 1 *mf*

Tpt. 2 *mp* *mf* *f* *mf*

Flugl. *mf* *mf* *f* *mf*

Horn 1 *mp* *mf* *mf* *f*

Horn 2 *mp* *mf* *f*

Horn 3 *mp* *mf* *f*

Horn 4 *mp* *mf* *f*

Tbn. 1 *mp* *mf* *mf* *f*

Tbn. 2 *mp* *mf* *f*

Bs. Trb. *mp* *mf* *f*

Tuba *mp* *mf* *f*

BD *p* *p* *mp*

3/4 4/4 2/4 2/4

84 **I** ♩=104, ♩=52 circa *rit.*

Tpt. 1 *mf* *f*

Tpt. 2 *mf* *f*

Flugl. *mf* *f*

Horn 1 *mf* *mf* *f*

Horn 2 *mf* *f*

Horn 3 *mf* *mf* *f*

Horn 4 *mf* *mp* *mf* *f*

Tbn. 1 *f* *mf* *f*

Tbn. 2 *mf* *mp* *mf* *f*

Bs. Trb. *mf* *mp* *mf* *f*

Tuba *mf* *mp* *mf* *f*

BD *mp*

2/2 3/2 2/2 3/2

93 **J** *a tempo* *molto rit.*

Tpt. 1 *p* *con sord. : straight* *mf* *senza sord.*

Tpt. 2 *mf*

Flugl. *mp* *cresc.*

Horn 1 *mf* *cresc.*

Horn 2 *mp* *cresc.*

Horn 3 *mp* *cresc.*

Horn 4 *mp* *cresc.*

Tbn. 1 *mp* *mf*

Tbn. 2 *mp* *cresc.*

Bs. Trb. *mp* *cresc.*

Tuba *mp* *cresc.*

BD

3/2 3/4 3/4 3/4

97 **K** ♩ = 84, *Maestoso* *allarg* *a tempo*

Tpt. 1 *ff*

Tpt. 2 *ff*

Flugl. *ff*

Horn 1 *ff*

Horn 2 *ff*

Horn 3 *ff*

Horn 4 *ff*

Tbn. 1 *ff*

Tbn. 2 *ff*

Bs. Trb. *ff*

Tuba *ff*

BD *f* *mf*

3/4 2/4 4/4 2/4 4/4

107 **L** *molto rit.* *a tempo* *rit.*

Tpt. 1 *molto* *n.* *mp*

Tpt. 2 *molto* *n.* *p* *f*

Flugl. *molto* *f* *p* *f*

Horn 1 *mf* *f*

Horn 2 *mf* *f*

Horn 3 *molto* *n.* *p*

Horn 4 *molto* *n.* *p*

Tbn. 1 *p*

Tbn. 2 *molto* *f* *p*

Bs. Trb. *p*

Tuba *molto* *n.* *p*

BD

2/4 3/4 4/4 2/4

114 **M** *a tempo* (♩=84)

Tpt. 1 *ff*

Tpt. 2 *ff* *mp*

Flugl. *ff*

Horn 1 *ff*

Horn 2 *ff* *brassy*

Horn 3 *f* *ff* *brassy*

Horn 4 *f* *ff* *brassy*

Tbn. 1 *ff*

Tbn. 2 *ff*

Bs. Trb. *ff*

Tuba *ff*

BD *f*

2/4 4/4 2/4 4/4

120 *molto rit.* **N** ♩=72 *poco a poco allarg.* (♩=52) *a tempo poco rit.*

Tpt. 1 *f* *ff*

Tpt. 2 *ff*

Flugl. *ff*

Horn 1 *ff*

Horn 2 *ff*

Horn 3 *mp* *ff*

Horn 4 *mp* *ff*

Tbn. 1 *ff*

Tbn. 2 *mp* *ff*

Bs. Trb. *ff*

Tuba *ff*

BD *ff* *f*

*trombone I dominates*

4/4

130 **O** *a tempo* *poco rit.* **P** *a tempo, or slightly slower*

Tpt. 1

Tpt. 2 2/4 4/4 3/4 *espress.* 4/4 3/4

Flugl. *espress.* *p*

Horn 1 *mf* *p*

Horn 2 *p*

Horn 3 2/4 4/4 3/4 *ppp* 4/4 3/4

Horn 4 *ppp*

Tbn. 1 *pp* *p* *ppp*

Tbn. 2 *pp* *ppp*

Bs. Trb. *pp*

Tuba 2/4 4/4 3/4 *ppp* 4/4 3/4

BD *pp* *ppp*

**Q** with more motion, ♩=84 circa

con sord. : Denis Wick cup, pushed in

140

Score for measures 140-146. Instruments: Tpt. 1, Tpt. 2, Flugl., Horn 1-4, Tbn. 1-2, Bs. Trb., Tuba, BD.

Measure 140: Tpt. 1 (pp), Tpt. 2 (3/4), Flugl. (3/4), Horn 1 (3/4), Horn 2 (3/4), Horn 3 (3/4), Horn 4 (3/4), Tbn. 1 (3/4), Tbn. 2 (3/4), Bs. Trb. (3/4), Tuba (3/4), BD (3/4).

Measure 141: Tpt. 1 (p), Tpt. 2 (4/4), Flugl. (4/4), Horn 1 (4/4), Horn 2 (4/4), Horn 3 (4/4), Horn 4 (4/4), Tbn. 1 (4/4), Tbn. 2 (4/4), Bs. Trb. (4/4), Tuba (4/4), BD (4/4).

Measure 142: Tpt. 1 (p), Tpt. 2 (2/3), Flugl. (2/3), Horn 1 (2/3), Horn 2 (2/3), Horn 3 (2/3), Horn 4 (2/3), Tbn. 1 (2/3), Tbn. 2 (2/3), Bs. Trb. (2/3), Tuba (2/3), BD (2/3).

Measure 143: Tpt. 1 (mp), Tpt. 2 (4/4), Flugl. (4/4), Horn 1 (4/4), Horn 2 (4/4), Horn 3 (4/4), Horn 4 (4/4), Tbn. 1 (4/4), Tbn. 2 (4/4), Bs. Trb. (4/4), Tuba (4/4), BD (4/4).

Measure 144: Tpt. 1 (mp), Tpt. 2 (4/4), Flugl. (4/4), Horn 1 (4/4), Horn 2 (4/4), Horn 3 (4/4), Horn 4 (4/4), Tbn. 1 (4/4), Tbn. 2 (4/4), Bs. Trb. (4/4), Tuba (4/4), BD (4/4).

Measure 145: Tpt. 1 (mp), Tpt. 2 (4/4), Flugl. (4/4), Horn 1 (4/4), Horn 2 (4/4), Horn 3 (4/4), Horn 4 (4/4), Tbn. 1 (4/4), Tbn. 2 (4/4), Bs. Trb. (4/4), Tuba (4/4), BD (4/4).

Measure 146: Tpt. 1 (mp), Tpt. 2 (4/4), Flugl. (4/4), Horn 1 (4/4), Horn 2 (4/4), Horn 3 (4/4), Horn 4 (4/4), Tbn. 1 (4/4), Tbn. 2 (4/4), Bs. Trb. (4/4), Tuba (4/4), BD (4/4).

147

**R** very freely

senza sord.

Score for measures 147-153. Instruments: Tpt. 1, Tpt. 2, Flugl., Horn 1-4, Tbn. 1-2, Bs. Trb., Tuba, BD.

Measure 147: Tpt. 1 (pp), Tpt. 2 (mp), Flugl. (pp), Horn 1 (p), Horn 2 (pp), Horn 3 (pp), Horn 4 (p), Tbn. 1 (p), Tbn. 2 (p), Bs. Trb. (p), Tuba (p), BD (p).

Measure 148: Tpt. 1 (pp), Tpt. 2 (mp), Flugl. (pp), Horn 1 (p), Horn 2 (pp), Horn 3 (pp), Horn 4 (p), Tbn. 1 (p), Tbn. 2 (p), Bs. Trb. (p), Tuba (p), BD (p).

Measure 149: Tpt. 1 (pp), Tpt. 2 (3/2), Flugl. (pp), Horn 1 (p), Horn 2 (pp), Horn 3 (pp), Horn 4 (p), Tbn. 1 (p), Tbn. 2 (p), Bs. Trb. (p), Tuba (p), BD (p).

Measure 150: Tpt. 1 (pp), Tpt. 2 (4/4), Flugl. (pp), Horn 1 (p), Horn 2 (pp), Horn 3 (pp), Horn 4 (p), Tbn. 1 (p), Tbn. 2 (p), Bs. Trb. (p), Tuba (p), BD (p).

Measure 151: Tpt. 1 (mp), Tpt. 2 (4/4), Flugl. (p), Horn 1 (mp), Horn 2 (pp), Horn 3 (pp), Horn 4 (p), Tbn. 1 (p), Tbn. 2 (p), Bs. Trb. (p), Tuba (p), BD (p).

Measure 152: Tpt. 1 (mp), Tpt. 2 (4/4), Flugl. (p), Horn 1 (mp), Horn 2 (pp), Horn 3 (pp), Horn 4 (p), Tbn. 1 (p), Tbn. 2 (p), Bs. Trb. (p), Tuba (p), BD (p).

Measure 153: Tpt. 1 (mp), Tpt. 2 (3/2), Flugl. (p), Horn 1 (mp), Horn 2 (pp), Horn 3 (pp), Horn 4 (p), Tbn. 1 (p), Tbn. 2 (p), Bs. Trb. (p), Tuba (p), BD (p).

157 S

Tpt. 1  
Tpt. 2  
Flugl.  
Horn 1  
Horn 2  
Horn 3  
Horn 4  
Tbn. 1  
Tbn. 2  
Bs. Trb.  
Tuba  
BD

169 T  $\text{♩} = 42$  ( $\text{♩} = 84$ )

rit.

Tpt. 1  
Tpt. 2  
Flugl.  
Horn 1  
Horn 2  
Horn 3  
Horn 4  
Tbn. 1  
Tbn. 2  
Bs. Trb.  
Tuba  
BD