

Essay

Essay is a dark and brash piece, raw and energetic. The title comes from the formal layout of the piece – the whole thing grows out of the opening material, and it has a very tight and logical developmental flow, like a well-structured argument. The title is potentially misleading however, in that it could imply a certain intellectual or cerebral quality to the piece. The affect of the piece is in fact anything but cerebral; it is in-your-face, physical, raw, bordering on the violent and grotesque. There is some relief in the contrasting slower sections, which are more flowing and lyrical, longing and pleading. A certain darkness and melancholy remains, however, and this music still grows from the same musical materials as the opening. There are even some very gentle, tender, chamber-music-like sections toward the end, before the opening material comes back one last time. This last time the music brightens, it seems that it may become triumphant and blast off into brighter regions – but at the last moment, the music turns back, and sinks back down again – the weight of the opening is simply too much to be overcome. September 11th, 2001 came as I was putting the final touches on *Essay*. Though I can't say that the events of that day inspired the piece, since it was basically fully composed before it happened, the violence and horror of that day were in the air as I finished the piece and attended its premiere in October 2001, and to me the piece somehow captures some of the anxiety, darkness, and fear of that time.