

IN THE SHADOW OF THE MOUNTAIN

IN THE SHADOW OF THE MOUNTAIN is a tone painting, using music and sound to portray the overwhelming size, power and majesty of a great mountain. It's adapted from the third movement of my orchestral work THOUSAND MILE SUITE. The percussion section has a special role to play in creating this soundscape. The timpani, bass drum and suspended cymbal combine to create earth-shaking effects that are heard throughout the piece. In fact, the very first thing the listener hears is a huge crescendo, starting from nothing, on the three percussion instruments. The bass drum is also the last sound the listener hears, it's low frequencies ringing out with a final solo strike.

IN THE SHADOW OF THE MOUNTAIN is based on a passacaglia, a massive repeating bass line played by the lowest instruments in the ensemble. The motion is stately, inevitable and relentless, constantly moving forward at a steady pace. Even in spots where the line drops out in the bass instruments, it doesn't go away, it just shifts up a few octaves to the high-register instruments, creating a feeling of constancy and continuity.

A two-note pattern creates the main "mountain" theme, heard first in the mid-low brass, and then expanding to a huge tutti as the music progresses. After a somber low-end solo in the euphonium, the passacaglia switches to the high register, supporting a fierce contrapuntal dialog that rages through the whole ensemble, especially featuring the low brass. The next section scales the highest reaches of the mountain, with the high winds featured at an intense and dizzying precipice, before the main theme comes back in full force, eventually completing the circular form by leading back down to where we started, with the percussion fading back into nothingness.