



University of North Texas  
College of Music

Guest Artist Recital | Tuesday, October 8, 2024 | 8:00 p.m.  
Recital Hall

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**Jason Haney, composer**  
**Richard Shuster, piano**

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The Ice at the End of the World ..... Jason Haney  
(2023) (b. 1969)  
concerto for piano and orchestra  
(version for two pianos)

1. The Persistence of Water
2. Crystalline Aurora
3. Waking the Giant

Richard Shuster, solo piano  
Jason Haney, piano

## Program Notes

*The Ice at the End of the World*, a concerto for piano and orchestra, was inspired by a trip to the Greenland ice cap I took in the summer of 2019 and is dedicated to three great musicians and friends, Richard Shuster, Michael Gerdes and Foster Beyers. It was written thanks in part to a grant of educational leave from James Madison University. The work is in three movements and is part of a series of pieces related to the unfolding crisis of human-caused climate change.

The summer of 2019 saw the largest amount of melting of the northern ice cap ever recorded in a single year: over 580 billion tons. The warming climate has all but guaranteed that the 2-mile thick sheet of ice covering the island will eventually melt away completely, raising sea levels by as much as 23 feet. Melting has always occurred here in summer, just not this much, and less snowfall in the warmer winters now means not as much of the melted ice is replaced, and so the ice sheet shrinks each year. This piece is an expression of my awe and appreciation at visiting this wonder of the world, in hopes that others may share in it.

### 1. The Persistence of Water

"The Persistence of Water" is a reflection on the journey of meltwater from the top of the ice sheet to the sea. It begins high above the coast, on brilliant blue-white ice, as tiny clear streams, which join together on their way seaward, and along the way create the ever-changing features of this incredible landscape. From valleys and mountains, to vast winding canyons, to tunnels, cliffs, deep blue pools, and wide, smooth expanses, the water carves the ice into an infinite variety of shapes. One phenomenon, a *moulin*, is a vertical shaft disappearing deep into the glacier that can be as small as a few inches in diameter or large enough to swallow a house. There are a few direct references to these frightening abysses that occasionally interrupt the music of this movement. Most of the movement uses flowing scales and other gestures to evoke the movement of water, but staccato chords and other surprises are reminders of the many shapes the eroded ice can take. Then, just before the piano cadenza gives an impression of the calming sea, there is a final plunge of the raging river of meltwater at its mightiest. The movement ends with the flowing scales heard as if in the distance, played by muted strings.

### 2. Crystalline Aurora

The image that I had in mind while writing this movement was of stepping out onto the glacier in the cold of a winter's night, surrounded by glistening snow and ice. The aurora borealis appears overhead, stretching impossibly

into the stratosphere, a cathedral of light moving and dancing as far as the eye can see. One is overwhelmed by its majesty, and changed by the experience.

### 3. Waking the Giant

A crack in the ice sheet is heard, and it begins to race across the surface, joining others that cross the expanse of the glacier. Before long, it reaches deep enough to split off an enormous section of the ice, which breaks up as it calves into the sea. This scene is happening more and more often in both Greenland and Antarctica, as the ice caps themselves begin to slide into the ocean, hastening their collapse. The giant is made up of the ice cap and the land underneath, weighed down by eons of compressed snowfall. Eventually, once enough ice has disappeared, that land will spring back up, an awakening unlike anything experienced during humanity's time on earth. This movement imagines a reaction to witnessing the glacial collapse, but at a human timescale, in its frightening and exhilarating scope.