

World premiere by the Louisville Orchestra and Scott Leger (horn) on May 9, 2025.

At a time when our country is more divided than ever, I reflected on a passage from the bible that is particularly important to many Pentecostal communities in Kentucky. In Acts of the Apostles Chapter 2, on the day of the Pentecost, Jesus gives his disciples the ability to suddenly be heard speaking in languages they did not know. Rather than attempting a kind of programmatic description, my horn concerto investigates the affects and emotional content of a miraculous moment when divided communities could, in an instant, feel recognized and heard. As a political metaphor, I think the gift of tongues is a particularly utopian and desirable vision for our world today. Though sustained hard work bridging political lines is no doubt necessary, perhaps this passage reminds us that we must also be open to the serendipitous and surprising moments when we can connect with those of radically different political communities.

This passage of the Pentecost inspired me to think of the French horn as a particularly gifted and versatile communicator within the orchestra. The solo horn part is nearly constantly in contrapuntal conversation with other sections of the orchestra, exchanging and developing musical ideas with each new passing context. At different times, many principals in the orchestra are given a soloistic and virtuosic passage when in dialogue directly with the solo horn, including the flutes, trumpets, violins, section horns, harp, double bass, timpani, and cello. Through these many encounters, the solo horn part evolves through a very intricate and nuanced microtonal language that reflects on the idiosyncrasies of each of its conversational partners in summation.

The first movement considers the astonishment and wonder of that moment when Jesus gave his apostles "divided tongues" in an instant, "as of fire." The slow and lyrical second movement ponders the ramifications of that moment, when his apostles had the new ability to spread his message "near and far" to different linguistic communities, and I explore the horn's ability to communicate spatially within the orchestra. The third movement reflects on a leader of monasticism, a mid-late 2nd century Christian sect, the prophet Maximilian who proclaimed "I am speech, spirit, and power." The monasticists believed that divine revelation could come directly through ecstatic fits of where followers would speak spontaneously in tongues. They were labeled as heretics and false prophets by the early Catholic church.

This piece owes a special debt of gratitude to Scott Leger for his many years of collaboration and friendship and to whom the solo horn part is dedicated. I write this piece also with sincere appreciation to the many principal players of the Louisville Orchestra with whom I met and for whose gifts and interests I especially wrote.