

The title, *Oceans Apart*, could hold many different connotations, and I hope listeners interpret it in a way that is meaningful for them. For me, the meaning refers to both broader issues—the uncertain, unsettling, and crazy climate of our time, and more intimate personal things. In the broad sense, the separation of concert music from so much of American society today, is an issue of concern, regret, and occasionally dread. As someone who feels this genre is the epitome of human expression, and has joyfully devoted my life to it, it is troubling to watch it drift farther and farther away from the consciousness of an ever-increasing number in our country.

There is my sense of astonishment at the immensity, the oceanic vastness, of the polarization of our time. People seem to be moving irreparably apart. The waves of misinformation spreading relentlessly over the web, the belief that such a thing as “alternative facts” can exist, and the swell of unharnessed power this has caused—these were in my thoughts. The gulf between sides is vast and difficult to comprehend, and that is reflected in the opening bars in simplistic perhaps naive musical terms—the unresolved tritone in the low register in the piano and the highest sounds, beyond any specific pitch, whispering incomprehensibly and at the edge of audibility in the strings.

In the more personal sense, like many artists, there is the sense of where I find myself and where I wish to be.

Writing this piece conjured to my mind the unlikely images of big wave surfers; one person surrounded—nearly consumed—by the daunting force and fury of these massive 100-foot walls of water. That scale feels akin to the relationship of a piano soloist and the force of a large symphony orchestra, whose sound is a vibration that manifests as a wave.

Music is truly an abstract language but as Robert Schumann said, it expresses all that words cannot. I wrote this piano concerto for Garrick Ohlsson, who is indisputably one of the greatest musicians of our day. With so many great masterworks, music of great depth and extraordinary pianism in the piano concerto genre, over eighty of which Mr. Ohlsson plays by memory, I found this a marvelous and daunting challenge. I hoped to make the piano the center of a true duet with the orchestra, while still allowing for the excitement of hearing a master virtuoso.

Justin Dello Joio