

PROGRAM NOTES: “Bentley Roses”

In 2002, the professor of flute at Bowling Green State University, in Ohio, Judith Bentley, decided to retire from a distinguished career. I had the pleasure of being one of Mrs. B’s students from 1981-1986, and I consider her one of my most influential composition teachers...indeed, she is one of those teachers who gives more than just lessons on a given instrument, she teaches about life, balancing a career, and how to be a professional. But she contributed to the music world in so many different ways: her students have gone on to excel in many different aspects of music, from principal positions in major orchestras, to owning one of the most distinguished piccolo companies in the world.

So as her retirement neared, her current and former students decided to commission a new work in her honor. We decided an appropriate work would incorporate the flute, have a vocal part for her daughter, Julia Bentley (a wonderful mezzo, who has sung for Network for New Music), and be accompanied by piano. We used texts by one of Mrs. B’s favorite poets, James Whitcomb Riley, from Indiana, the state where she grew up. And I decided, while pouring through this poet’s works, that I would select several poems that focused on roses, since this would be a bouquet, given by her students; and thus the piece is named in her honor.

This work was premiered on May 4, 2002, in Bowling Green, Ohio, in a surprise concert, where all of her students returned and put on a full recital in Mrs. Bentley’s honor.

--Jennifer Higdon