

Program note:

Unfortunately, life's vicissitudes brought me a major health challenge this year. In February, I suffered a stroke. My left arm and leg were affected. The good news though is that my mind is still intact, and I am still here to talk about it! The prognosis for my recovery is encouraging - I am slowly regaining my ability to walk and I'm told that I may eventually regain full use of my left hand, although it may take months to years before I can reliably play the piano again with both hands. In the interim, I have been working on a short right-hand-alone program that will feature my new composition, "Diary of a Stroke: The Adventures of Herb and Pete".

What on earth could "the adventures of Herb and Pete" possibly have to do with my suffering a stroke? Hint: Herb and Pete are pet names I adopted for my left leg and arm while in the rehab hospital. As I was composing this piece, I kept ruminating on how I could keep it from becoming unbearably depressing when, schazam! - Herb and Pete to the rescue! Besides being the subject matter of the second movement of the piece, you can find hints of their antics in the breathless respites of the grueling "Rehab" movement, in the "Dance of the Neurons" (which attempts to depict the amazing capability of the mind to rewire itself following a brain injury), and in the short epilogue, "Hope". Opening the piece and interspersed throughout, the "Stroke Fatigue" sections intend to give an idea of the overwhelming, ever present tiredness that many stroke patients experience. A single line bathed in pedal alternates with a distant sounding chorale-like theme that forms the basis for the penultimate movement, "An Unbearable Loss". Here, my heart is an open wound until Herb and Pete reappear, gallivanting about, celebrating the wondrous, innate healing power of the human body.

Haskell Small, September, 2021