Solstice
By David Beidenbender

Solstice was written for my friends in the Garth Newel Piano Quartet and for the beautiful place they call home, the Garth Newel Music Center in Bath County in the Allegheny Mountains near Warm Springs, Virginia. The piece is divided into four movements, one for each season—Summer, Autumn, Winter, and Spring—and are ordered as such because I visited Garth Newel in each season beginning in August 2017. The title comes from the solstices, which, along with the equinoxes, divide the seasons. The word solstice is derived from the Latin sol (sun) and sistere (to stand still), because at the solstices, the sun’s declination “stands still”; that is, the seasonal movement of the Sun’s daily path (as seen from Earth) stops at a northern or southern limit before reversing direction. For me, this idea of “standing still” captures the essence of my experiences visiting Garth Newel: it is in this place—among the mountains and among friends, great music, and incredible food—that I have often found stillness, quiet, peace, and happiness—a respite from the everyday.

Summer begins with an homage to the most incredible cicadas and crickets I’ve ever heard. A series of warm chords and sweeping melodies introduces much of the musical material for the entire piece. For me, like summer, this music is bright, warm, and full of possibility and excitement.

Autumn is twilight, an ending. It’s the end of the summer, the end of the year, the end of warm, sunny days, and the harbinger of winter. This season is my favorite, but it is also filled with bittersweet nostalgia.

Winter is cold, icy, distant, and persistent. The melodic material in this movement is a quotation of and meditation on Charles Ives’ The Unanswered Question.

Spring is bright again, beginning with rain and eventually returning to a transformed version of the fast, dancing music from Summer. I have an affinity for bluegrass and for the traditional fiddling that comes from Appalachia and the mountains surrounding Garth Newel, and this spirit, overflowing with energy and joy, also found its way into this movement.