

PROGRAM NOTES

Ghost Of The Fitzgerald (2009)
For Amplified Wood Alto Flute,
DigitalFX, and Computer

David G. Weiss
(ASCAP)
World Premier

Ghost Of The Fitzgerald envisions the ghostship of the S.S. Edmund Fitzgerald, a “Lake Freighter” that sailed the Great Lakes in the mid 20th century. At 729 ft, it was the largest ship of its kind at the time - only 150 ft. shorter than the Titanic. The Fitzgerald went down in Lake Superior November of ‘75, during a furious late autumn storm. Locals call these violent storms “The Witch of November”. Tragically, all 29 men aboard were lost. To this day, the exact cause of the disaster is unknown.

One of the “Mighty Fitz’s” frequent ports of call was Duluth, Minnesota. As a boy in the 60’s and 70’s I visited there often, as my mother’s parents and family had lived there for generations. I was fascinated with the lake - a true inland sea - and the big ships silently sailing in and out of the harbor. I don’t know if I saw the Fitz while I was there, but my folks say it was probable.

Since the tragedy, numerous sightings have been claimed of a ghostship of the Fitz on Lake Superior, searching, as it were, for its final port of call.

THE MUSIC: “Ghost” is influenced by the genre known as “Ambient Music,” a term credited to one of its most well known composers, Brian Eno. “Ambient Music” seems to know no boundaries. Composers and groups as diverse as John Cage, Pink Floyd, Ives, Tangerine Dream, Satie, Morton Feldman, Kraftwerk, Miles Davis, and arguably even the 13th century Perotin, have all been associated with “Ambient Music.”

The music is comprised of three voices: prerecorded synthesizer (the water), live wood flute windtones (the wind), and prerecorded flute whistletones (the ghostship). The whistletones are inspired by the boatswain’s whistle (aka Bosun’s pipe) used by sailors. They were recorded from a Gold Flute and a G bamboo flute, in various tonalities and tunings, though largely in B, which is the dominant drone. The live wood flute part is derived from a Japanese Shakuhachi technique called “Muraiki”, loosely translated as “thrashing breath.”

THE GEAR: The whistletones and windtones are processed with digital FX in the computer - mostly Altiverb convolution reverberation software. Convolution reverbs digitally recreate the “sonic footprint” of an environment. For “Ghost”, the environments utilized are: Austerlitz forest in the Netherlands; the inside of a Boesendorfer piano; a church in Amsterdam; Wendy Carlos’s plate reverb; and a huge water cistern in Washington state.