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motorcycle collided with a fawn that ran into his path on the highway. "He hit the fawn at a point where the road curved. He went off the curve, and sailed off of an embankment," Stephen said.

Within two weeks after his son's death, Stephen composed "In Memoriam," a two-movement work written to commemorate Jonathan's life.

"It was a very necessary thing for me to go through," he said. "In writing this, this was one of the ways of saying goodbye to my son, and the words are really very beautiful. That was my way of giving myself an inner peace that Jon was all right, that he was in a good place, that he was being taken care of, that he was full of joy, and that he was surrounded by love."

"In Memoriam" is included on a new CD of Stephen's work entitled "All Love Unbounded." Also included on the disk is one of his new Christmas creations, "The Joys of Mary," which will be premiered by the South Dakota Symphony Chamber Orchestra Dec. 17-20 for the 13th annual Christmas at the Cathedral, held at St. Joseph's Cathedral in Sioux Falls.

The South Dakota Symphony Orchestra will also premiere Stephen's work for brass choir, "Fanfare Noel," during their annual Christmas concerts Dec. 11-13 in Sioux Falls.

Stephen admits that he likely will always feel the pain of losing his son, but the experience of grieving and mourning has served to heighten the sense of joy he feels as Christmas approaches.

"It has changed my whole view toward life. I now realize that life is so precious, and it can be taken at an instant at any time," he said. "Heaven, in a sense, is very real to me, and I know that when I die, that's where I'll go, and I'll go just like that," he said, clapping his hands together. "There won't be any time interval that I'll be aware of, so, you realize how precious life is, and how terribly fragile it is."

"And yet, what a gift it is," Stephen said. "And you want to use your life, after something like that, to make other people's lives better – to make them joyful, to make them realize that life is such a tremendous blessing, and that love is the one thing that holds it all together."

A pleasant job

The two compositions that will be introduced this month bring to six the number of orchestral music pieces Stephen has created in recent years for the Christmas. He doesn't feel added pres-

sure to try to create something special for the holiday celebration.

"Frankly, it's just another job. It's a little more of a pleasant one, because you know that it is going to be used for something very beautiful, and you try and write something very beautiful and very exciting," Stephen said. "It's actually my favorite time of the year, and I love writing in this venue better than any other. But the process of work is the same as it is for any of my other works."

To keep his creativity fresh, and not get mired in too-familiar territory when writing for the holiday season, Stephen immerses himself in research to gain new ideas for the topic he has in mind for his work.

"You try to explore and make something new each time. I really don't think about trying to make something new. I just think about the work itself that I've been asked to write, and I start by just throwing a musical idea on the computer," he said. "I never use a keyboard anymore. I write just on this little computer, and it plays everything back. I put something up, an idea of some kind, and I see what comes of it."

Stephen does nearly all of his work from a small office in his home, with shelves filled with reference material. No large piano is needed; he composes his work on a laptop computer at his desk.

"With 'The Joys of Mary,' I started with a series of eighth notes, so I had a rhythmic impulse that I wanted to start with at the beginning. Once I had that, the melody came," he said, snapping his finger, "like that. It just popped out of the air. Once you start the process of working, that's when the inspiration comes."

"If you try to wait around for the inspiration to strike, it usually doesn't come. But when you sit down to work, and you start with an idea, then you sort of start salivating, and start saying to yourself, 'This is really going to work,' or 'This is going to turn out great.' I never know how a piece is going to end, and I never know where it's going. It sort of has its own life, and the life that it has is dependant upon the material that I start with," Stephen said. "Some material lends itself to extensive use, other material lends itself to say, an introduction. Some material might be thematic in nature, some might be very playful – all of that happens in the process of the work itself."

When involved in creating a new composition, Stephen tries to write 20 measures of music each day.

"I don't always get that, because I teach full time at

the university, but during the summer, I'm usually able to do that," he said. "I usually do most of my work in the summer, although these two Christmas pieces were written during the school year."

Stephen uses special software called Finale on his computer. It allows him to play back the music he has written at the correct tempo and with the sounds of all of the orchestral instruments that will play the composition.

"So, if I write for orchestra, I will hear the sounds of the orchestra coming in," he said. Stephen's computer is hooked to special speakers that fill his small home studio with the rich sounds of his compositions.

The creative process

"Once I start on something, the music just seems to flow. It flows because I have immersed myself in music now for some 50-odd years as a performer, as a writer, as a listener and as a reader," he said. "I have learned the essence of the language of music, particular tonal music, the type of music that I write."

"Once I start the process of writing, it usually flows very easily. Sometimes I get stuck, and when that happens, I generally sit in that chair and rock and think, or I may go for a walk, and walk at the pace of the tempo that I'm working with, and think through different ideas," Stephen said. "I let them bubble up, and usually I get one, and I put in the computer and play with it and see if it will work, and if it doesn't, then I repeat the process until I find something that works."

For Stephen, the creative process involves knowing the "language" of music, and knowing the techniques of composition. He was taught special lessons in that area by an excellent instructor, he said, while he was in graduate school.

"Once you have that, the writing flows fairly easily once you get started," he said.

The proper tools

Today's age of the home computer and special software has transformed the way Yarbrough and other musicians compose their works. Early in his musical career, he and his peers had to write music the old-fashioned way – sitting at a piano, selecting notes, and scratching them out on paper, measure by measure.

"I used to do everything by hand, and I had a drafting board that I worked on," Stephen said. "My hand is a very good hand, and my written scores are almost like printed ones, they're so beautiful. But that kind of painstaking work took its toll

on my neck and my shoulders, and I had chronic, unremitting pain, and had all sorts of treatment for it."

For a time, he believed he would have to temporarily suspend his work as a composer to give himself time to heal. Technology proved to be the best elixir.

"Finale (software) came out, and I sold one of my cars to get my first copy of it, and from then on, the pain was gone. I didn't have to draft anything," Stephen said. "That was a wonderful, wonderful thing to discover."

The software also allows him to receive instant feedback. He can immediately hear what he has written simply by playing it on his computer, allowing him to immediately hear the various layers of his writing. "The software has increased the speed of my composing probably a hundredfold," he said.

Faith, and saying goodbye

Faith has always been an important ingredient in Stephen's creative process. He found his beliefs strengthened, not tested, following his son's death, in part because of the touching message he was able to create that is universally understood by all who hear it.

"For me, being a Christian, there's an interaction between the Holy Spirit and what I'm doing. I don't think the music is coming out of me, particularly. I think it's something that's given to me, that I have to work through," he said. "It's a collaborative process, and I

try to be sensitive to what the spirit is saying, in terms of where the music wants to go. Most of the time, things work out very well."

Music, to Stephen, is an exercise in faith.

"I've always had an impulse to write sacred music, and even when the music isn't particularly sacred, it will have what I think of as a sacred quality, and that quality usually is joy," he said. "My music is inherently joyful; I can't help it. The funny thing is I suffer from a clinical depression, and I take medication for it every day, but when I write music, what comes out is just the opposite of depression. So, I think that must be what my soul is really like on the inside."

Besides taking time to research before writing a composition, Stephen takes time for prayer and meditation.

"I pray for each project as I begin it, and I pray while I'm in the process of working on it. Sometimes I will pray when I get stuck, and that often generates ideas," he said.

Following his son's death, Stephen discovered the craft of composing music is a true blessing. Writing his orchestral scores still serves as an important coping mechanism. The two-week process of writing "In Memoriam," in honor of Jonathan "was a very necessary thing for me to go through," he said. "Writing this was one of the ways of saying goodbye."

The song premiered in the fall of 2008 by the USD Chamber Singers. "They took

it on tour, and it touched a lot of people," Stephen said. "A lot of people cried because of it, but they were good tears."

"It always get me at my core – that we were created because God wanted us, and that God loves everything that he created, and this his love for us will never end, and the only thing that can keep us from his love is ourselves if we choose to ignore him."

Life for the Yarbrough family was forever changed following Jonathan's fatal accident. The sadness continues, but Stephen chooses to cling to the gifts he's discovered following his son's death.

"Things like family become much more precious, and I have a different approach to my students now," he said.

Stephen recalled a saying of Mother Teresa, who said that every person she encountered was Christ presented to her in whatever form that person happened to be in – whether crippled, blind or near death.

"I tend to think of every person that I meet as the manifestation of Christ, and I realize that the way I treat them is the way that I treat Christ. So, forgiveness and compassion and love are far more important to me now than they had ever been in my life," he said. "One cannot live without forgiveness, one cannot be truly human without compassion, and one cannot even exist without love."

"So, all of that goes into my music. If anything, I want to make people be aware that they are loved, whether they think so or not," Stephen said.

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