

*Palindrome* (1997)

James Niblock

“The literary palindrome reads the same word(s) backwards as forward. Examples would be the tribute to Theodore Roosevelt, ‘A man, a plan, a canal, Panama,’ or ‘Able was I ere I saw Elba.’ In music, the device is called ‘retrograde’ and is generally used as a part of a larger work, but occasionally we find it used as a complete composition. It is a compositional practice that has been used from the fourteenth century to the present.

This *Palindrome* begins quietly and builds to a single, major climax where the harmonies become more intense, rhythmic activity more lively, and the structure telescoped and condensed. The retrograde begins at the peak of the climax and continues, note for note, as it accrued, to a quiet close.”

—James Niblock

The world premiere of *Palindrome* was on July 9, 1997 in Stewart Shell at the Blue Lake Fine Arts Festival, Blue Lake, Michigan.

James Niblock (1917–2018) was a composer, conductor, violinist, and music educator. Born in Scappoose, Oregon, he received a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Bachelor of Education degree from Washington State University. After serving in the US Air Force in World War II, he earned a Master of Arts degree from Colorado College and a doctorate from the University of Iowa. He studied violin with Franck Eichenlaub, Jascha Brodsky, and Josef Gingold; composition with Roy Harris and Paul Hindemith.

From 1948 until 1985, Niblock was a faculty member at Michigan State University where he taught theory and composition, performed as violinist in the Beaumont String Quartet, and served as Chairman of the College of Music. During his fifteen years as Chairman, a new music building was constructed to expand departmental facilities, student enrollment doubled, the number of graduate assistants tripled, eighteen new full-time faculty positions were added, and the Juilliard String Quartet became visiting artists on campus for nine years. For many years of his service at the University, Niblock was also Concertmaster of the Lansing Symphony Orchestra.

Following his retirement, Niblock remained active as a conductor, performer, and composer. He also had a long association with the Blue Lakes Fine Arts Camp in Muskegon County, Michigan and continued to serve as Senior Vice President and life member of the Board of Trustees until his death. In 2006, MSU honored Niblock with the first ever Distinguished Emeritus Faculty Award for his continuing work in Fine Arts Education, and in 2012 he was presented Washington State University’s highest award, the Alumni Achievement Award.

Niblock’s more than one hundred compositions are housed at the Michigan State University Library Archives. Many of these were written and performed for the anniversary celebrations at the Blue Lake camp, e.g., the opera *Ruth* for the thirty-fifth anniversary and the chamber opera *The Last Leaf* for the fortieth. His works have been frequently performed both in America and Europe and are available through Harrock Hall (choral works) and Brotons & Mercadal Edicions (instrumental works). Recordings available on CD include the six trios for violin, clarinet, and piano and the *Double Concerto for Violin, Clarinet and Orchestra*, all of which were written for the Verdehrs.