

## Video Transcript: Sunset on the Somme

**Lorna McGhee, Principal Flute, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra:**

When we went back to the veteran's hospital for the second time, we were very proactive in advance to ask what the specific goals were. It's not just the case of going and presenting music or presenting a nice concert. The goals are quite specific actually and so in working with Ginger the music therapist, we had wonderful guidance from her. So she said the main focus is to help these elderly patients—to really stimulate them and to stimulate their cognitive functioning, to encourage them to interact with each other, to encourage eye contact, to help lift their spirits.

So, for example, one of the melodies that we played—I introduced it—it's famous, well it's not that famous, but in the piping tradition it's a pretty famous tune and it's called "Sunset." And it was written by a soldier who fought in the First World War in the Battle of the Somme. He was in one of the Highland regiments from Scotland, and so it fitted in with our Celtic theme and also playing for veterans it's very nice to present them a piece that was written by a soldier and that was actually written in the trenches. So it's a very, very haunting melody and I can play you a little bit now.

*[Lorna plays an excerpt from "Sunset on the Somme" by Pipe Major George S. McLennan.]*

So it's a melody that has a beautiful, quiet dignity to it. I told the soldiers, the participants there, about the tradition in piping of playing in the outdoors, and you know you could imagine the piper a long way away—walking towards you with his bagpipes and then going into the distance again. So I gave them that image to have in their minds as I played it. And that piece, as I said, has a quiet dignity so that's one of the kind of pieces that really can provide either reflection, meditation, but it can also provide a strength because it's got a certain kind of wonderful pace to it and a step and the melody itself has got a certain strength in it, so it's like a real resource. And it was wonderful to hear some of the stories that that helped bring back for people.

For example, there was a man there who had been stationed over in Britain, and he could remember hearing one of the Scottish regiments pass by where he was stationed. He was on guard duty, and he can remember saluting to the pipe band as they marched past, and he enjoyed telling that story. And maybe that was triggered by the image of the pipers coming from the distance and walking by, or perhaps it was the melody that had stirred that memory. So that was one of the stories.

And Ginger, the music therapist, was wonderful at this stage in her presentation. She asked the patients there, 'In times of your greatest difficulty or in times that were very dark when you were in combat, what was a resource for you in the same way that this beautiful melody "Sunset" had been a resource for this Scottish soldier in the First World War?' And it was really moving to hear what some of the patients said. I remember there was one man who had been in Vietnam and he said he had carried a photograph of his family and that he always looked at that when he was really struggling. So it's wonderful that Ginger helped to stimulate some of these personal stories.