David Feurzeig, a pianist and composer who joined the faculty of the University of Vermont in 2008. He wrote this essay to accompany the program for the Vermont Symphony Orchestra’s “Made in Vermont” tour, which runs Sept. 21-Oct. 1 with stops in Johnson, Vergennes, Derby Line, Lyndonville, Bellows Falls, Randolph, St. Albans and Castleton. The VSO commissioned Feurzeig to create “High Water” for the tour.

“High Water” is my musical response to Irene and its aftermath.

The first of the three continuous sections, “Rain,” begins with gentle, endlessly falling figures depicting the deceptively mild start of the storm. As the descending gestures gain intensity, they gradually transform into ascending motives representing the waters’ inexorable rise, the source of Irene’s real destructive power. These build to a rapid climax followed by an even more abrupt denouement.

This leads immediately into the slow middle section, “Silt,” the emotional heart of the piece. Low, gloomy string chords suggest the seemingly endless sludge left in Irene’s wake, and more broadly the feeling of shock and paralysis as we tried to repair buildings, fields, and lives mired in the unyielding muck. Long, tortuous melodies ascend from depths of the orchestra only to fall back repeatedly into the morass, and the movement ends exactly where it began. The cry of the mourning dove, interjected by the woodwinds at the beginning and the end of the section, is both a lament and a promise that the waters will eventually recede.

A haunting statement of the folksong “Goodnight Irene” acts as a transition to the final section, “Grit” — alluding not to a physical material but to the resolve and neighborly hard work that followed the devastation. The rousing theme comes from Castleton composer Ebenezer Child’s 1802 hymn “Vermont,” whose text reads in part:

Lord, thou hast called thy grace to mind;

Thou hast reversed thy heavy doom,

Thou made thy fiercest wrath abate,

And brought thy wand’ring captives home.

After a triumphant development, a brief coda brings back the gentle rain music of the opening, as the horn bids Irene a final goodnight. But the flute has the last word: “I’ll see you in my dreams …”

Thanks to the VSO for this invitation, to Anthony Princiotti and the players for making it happen, and to Pete Sutherland for helping me find “Vermont.”