

CELLO CONCERTO

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts
(Music Composition)
in The University of Michigan
2010

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was commissioned by Hobart Bell for Lynn Harrell and the Angeli Ensemble.

Special Thanks to:

Judith Becker
William Bolcom
Evan Chambers
Michael Daugherty
The Davis-Wall Family
Adam Haslett
Nadine Hubbs
Andy Kuster
Kristin Kuster
Mark Latham
Mark Marotto
Odaline de la Martinez
Judith Weir
Alan Yamamoto

PREFACE

I imagine this piece as a kind of instrumental opera, in which the solo cello assumes the lead role amidst a cast of supporting characters – i.e. the eight other players. In the first movement, “Prologue,” various combinations of the ensemble serve as a Greek Chorus that precedes the main drama of the work. At the piece’s beginning, the solo cellist acts as an accompanist to this chorus. Gradually, as the movement unfolds, the cello emerges as the soloist, culminating in a cadenza or “soliloquy” at the end of the first movement. In the episodic second movement, “Act One,” I envision a series of short, unfolding arias compacted into a span of six minutes – culminating in a melodic passage full of nostalgic associations. The third and shortest movement, “Dances and Interludes” is a light and casual jaunt featuring pizzicato cello, double bass, and bassoon. I think of it as a dramatic foil between the weightier second and fourth movements.

The fourth movement, “Act Two,” is the work’s core. Here, an increasingly fraught and virtuosic cello solo is underpinned by call-and-response gestures between the accompanying strings and woodwinds. Fast and unrelenting, the movement builds through a series of climaxes, with an enflamed cadenza halfway through the movement. Before the final and most violent crescendo, a lone bassoon recalls a frail and fleeting fragment of Act One’s nostalgic “aria.” In the fifth and last movement, “Epilogue and Processional,” the cello takes on a meditative and lyrical character – with a slow, simple ostinato rolling forward in the piano and bass. I imagine this movement as both a love scene and ritualistic procession.

Several narrative threads run throughout the course of the five movements. For example, overall, the general thrust of the piece is from the lowest registers to the highest – as embodied in the solo cellist’s move from the lowest C in bar one to the highest E in the penultimate measure. Another narrative strand is the reoccurrence and reorchestration of unisons throughout the piece – most obviously in Movements I, III and V.

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Instrumentation

Commissioned by Hobart Bell, for Lynn Harrell and the Angeli Chamber Orchestra

Score in C

Oboe/English Horn (1 player)
Clarinet in B-flat
Bassoon

Piano

Solo Violoncello

Violin
Viola
Double Bass

Performance Notes

Accidentals carry throughout the bar.
All tremolo figures should be played unmetred.

Duration

ca. 26 minutes