

Sonata for Unaccompanied Cello — Program Note

I composed this sonata after hearing Nick Dinnerstein perform at the 2005 Srinakarinwirot University Composition Festival, impressed by his playing and his enthusiasm for new music for unaccompanied cello. It is dedicated to him and to Greg Hamilton, Gloria Lum, and Brooks Whitehouse in appreciation of their generous technical advice.

The Prelude, an homage to Benjamin Britten's great cello suites, alternates between a broad, majestic theme and intimate, nostalgic passages in harmonics "like distant bells." Inspired by Bach as well as Britten, I sought to create a full contrapuntal texture with what is essentially a single-line instrument. Thus this challenging movement is in double-stops throughout, and the double-stopped natural harmonics in the quiet sections demand absolutely virtuosic poise and control. The all-pizzicato Corrente is light, like a scherzo, while the following Notturmo is intimate and expressive, with strange two-note "sigh" gestures made of a combination of harmonic and normal tones. After a melancholy and song-like Saraband comes the fiendishly difficult final Gigue. The cellist must sound like two seemingly different instruments at once: at the opening, a rapidly repeated C-sharp sounds over a slowly rising bass line; later on, longer harmonic tones occur in rapid alternation with fast "ordinary" notes. The sonata closes as the principal Gigue idea merges with the theme of the Prelude, this cyclic gesture a final nod to Britten's first cello suite.

Sonata
for
Unaccompanied Cello

Prelude
Corrente
Notturmo
Air (Saraband)
Gigue

Total duration ca. 14 minutes

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Nick Dinnerstein, Greg Hamilton, Gloria Lum, and Brooks Whitehouse
in appreciation of their generous cellistic advice.

Sorry it came out hard anyway.

David Feurzeig
2006