

AARON HOUSTON

Katabasis

- for solo cello -

For Perusal Use Only

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- I. Aleppo
- II. Toward Madness
- III. Canto
- IV. Contrapasso

Performance time: ca. 9:00

PROGRAM NOTE

Katabasis is a term for a journey of descent. There are many such journeys chronicled throughout mythological history – Orpheus and Dante’s *Inferno* being among the most popular. *Katabasis* is a work that descends into the wildness of life and music. It moves beyond the refined image on the surface and exposes the gritty reality that exists behind it.

The opening movement, *Aleppo*, gets its name from an unknown word found in Dante’s *Inferno*. Uttered by a demon guarding the lower circles of hell, nobody has been able to identify and translate the word; however, many have connected it to the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This unidentifiable beginning serves as the source of all the material that comes later.

Toward Madness marks the turn of this material toward the manic. Standing in contrast to the opening movement, *Toward Madness* expresses the swirling winds of a hurricane threatening destruction.

Following this furious movement is a brief moment of reprieve. *Canto* acts as the calm after a storm and pays homage to Benjamin Britten’s *Suite No. 1 for Cello*. This lyrical, multi-layered movement provides the performer an opportunity to be freely expressive in painting the lines of the melody. However, like standing in the eye of the hurricane, there is more to come.

Contrapasso means to “suffer the opposite” and, ending where we started, is inspired by Dante’s *Inferno* in which souls suffer in a way that is in contrast to the way they lived. Here, this final movement is full of wrath and fury – the opposite of the lyrical, chorale-like characteristic of the movement before it.

This work was commissioned and premiered by Holden Bitner.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Techniques key –

All diamond notes indicate for harmonic pressure to be used. This holds true even if the notes utilized are not available as harmonics on the string.

“m.s.t.” = “molto sul tasto”

“s.t.” = “sul tasto”

ord. = cancels all playing technique alterations

“s.p.” = “sul ponticello”

“m.s.p.” = “molto sul ponticello”



= growing in bow strength to distort the sound.



= to increase vibrato to a wide, erratic level.

“x -----> y” = move gradually from playing technique “x” to technique “y”.

All movements are to be played *attacca* or with only a brief pause when noted.

Katabasis

Commissioned and premiered by Holden Bitner

Aaron Houston

I. Aleppe

Mysterioso, ♩ = c. 63

The musical score is written for a single cello in 4/4 time. It consists of three systems of notation, each with three staves. The first system (measures 1-6) features a melodic line in the upper two staves and a bass line in the lower staff. Dynamics range from *p* to *mf*. The second system (measures 7-10) includes a change in time signature to 5/4 and back to 4/4. Dynamics include *p*, *mf*, and *f*. The third system (measures 11-16) features a melodic line with triplets and a bass line. Dynamics range from *mf* to *pp*. The fourth system (measures 17-20) is marked "Slightly Quicker, ♩ = 72-76" and includes performance instructions such as "pizz.", "arco", "jeté", "sul pont.", and "ord.". Dynamics range from *pp* to *f*.

22

pizz. *f* *mp* *fp* *f* *f* arco *p*

28

p *f* *mf* *p* *f* *f*

35

II. Toward Madness

With intensity but consistent, ♩ = 112

mp *pp* *mp* *f* *mp* *p sub.* *sfz*

39

fp with weight

42

mf *p* *m.s.t. fp*

46

p *6* *sfz* *mf* *p* *3* *3* *mf* *p* *f* *p* *II pizz.*

49 arco
pp *ff* *mp*

52 *p sub.* *fp*

55 *f* *p* *f*

58 *sfz* *mf*

63 *p* *f* *p* *f* *s.p.*

67 *ord.* *ord.* *s.p.* *fp* *f* *fp*

70 *f* *ord.* *p* *f* *sul pont.*

74 *p* *f* *p* *f*

78

aggressively

mp *f* *mp*

81

ff

84

ff

88

fp *f*

92

tr *in the string*

ff *pp* *ff*

96

fp *ff* *ff*

m.s.p. *ord.*

III. Canto

With rubato, ♩ = c. 69-76

101

Pause for 5"

pp *f molto espressivo* *mp* *f*

107 *mf* *f* *mp* rit.....

.....a tempo accel.....a tempo

114 *f > p* *f*

molto rit.....a tempo

120 *mf* *p* *mf* *f* *p*

127 *cresc.*

accel.....a tempo accel.....morendo.....

133 *f* *p sub.* *f sub.* *mf* *p* *pp*

IV. Contrapasso

Furiously, ♩ = c. 152

138 *f con forza*

141

144 *fp*

ord. s.p. ord.

147 *f*

150 *tr* *in the string*
fp — *f*

154

157

160 I II I II

164 *tr*
fp — *f*

169 m.s.p. *tr* ord. I II m.s.p. m.s.t. *p sub.*
fp — *f* *fp* — *f*

174 m.s.t. — ord. *mf*

177 *p sub.*

180 s.p. *fp*

183 *f* *tr*

186

ff

189

p sub. ord. III

194

fp ord. IV

198

f on the string

202

sfz *p* off the string

207

fp *f* *tr*

212

f *jeté*

216

(h) 3

221 *p* sub. *f* *ff* sub.

ord. → s.p. 225 ord. *mf* > *pp* *f*

231 *sfz* *mf* > *pp*

236 *f*

239 ord. → s.p.

242 m.s.p. ord. *ff*

245 inc. bow pressure

248 (inc. bow pressure) ord. *sfz*