

Cello Concerto

October 22, 2015–January 25, 2016
Duration: about 27 minutes

for Bonnie Thron and Grant Llewellyn

I have had the pleasure of making music with Principal Cellist of the NC Symphony Bonnie Thron and her husband clarinetist Fred Jacobowitz since 2008. She spoke with Grant Llewellyn, music director of the orchestra, in April 2015 about writing something for her as soloist. Grant then asked me to come up with a piece. After finishing other projects, I got to work on this concerto, after asking Grant for Welsh themes; one of his suggestions is the basis for the first movement.

- I. Over the Stone (Tros y Garreg)
Adagio; Cyflym; Adagio; Cyflym; Cymedrol; Ychydig yn gyflymach [9']
- II. Heart Song *Largo* [8']
- III. Contradanza *Fidelio* [2']
- IV. Schlimmbesserung *Vivace* [7:20]

The theme for the first movement is the traditional Welsh song “Tros y Garreg”, or “Over the Stone”. The song is attributed to Rhys Bodychen, who fought at the Battle of Bosworth Field on the side of the Tudors against Richard III in 1485. The lyrics reflect on those who have fallen in battle. This melody has been altered from the original by George Thompson, who published Welsh airs in 1809, 1811, and 1817. I prefer his version for this purpose to the original. Note that the end of the melody resembles the theme from the last movement of J. S. Bach’s *Brandenburg Concerto No. 5*, which factors into my treatment. Also, the traditional harp music of Wales led me to have an important harp part throughout this concerto.

I made a point of using particularly incomprehensible, unspellable, and unpronounceable Welsh words for tempo markings in the first movement. *Cyflym* means “fast”; *Cymedrol* means “moderate”; *Ychydig yn gyflymach* means “a little faster.”

The very short third movement started life back about 1990 as the second movement of my *Fourth Sonata for Solo Violin*. (There is a total of ten such sonatas.) Until recently I thought it was a tango, as I am easily bored with details in music theory and sometimes don’t look things up. In fact, it is a contradanza, a dance form originating in Havana—hence the tempo marking *Fidelio*. The solo cello part can be performed by itself in a pinch. The instrumentation in the third movement is the same as the rest of the piece, except that it lacks the second trumpet.

The fourth movement is titled *Schlimmbesserung*, which is German for “an effort to make things better that ends up making things worse”.

Performance notes

Instrumentation: two flutes (second flute doubles piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, harp, solo cello, and strings.

In the first movement, measures 163-176, and 273 to the end, the solo part is marked *tutti*. The soloist is playing with the orchestra, and it doesn’t matter that it cannot be heard distinctly. There are several passages through the piece where the orchestra will overpower the solo cello. In those places, the cello should be amplified, thus allowing full volume for the ensemble.

As the harp has a prominent part, it should be located in proximity to the soloist, not in the back as usual.

Accidentals hold through the measure and not beyond, and do not apply to octaves.

Cover art: frontispiece from *Musical and poetical relics of the Welsh bards* by Edward Jones, 1784.