

Of Bells and Broken Shadows

Of Bells and Broken Shadows, for cello and piano.

Duration: 7 minutes.

October 2008. I am asked to write the obligatory piece for the VI International Carlos Prieto Cello Competition. The caller is none other than the man after whom the competition is named. In the following months, I set to work on this piece, which I finally present and dedicate to Mtro. Carlos Prieto, one of the most outstanding musicians of our time.

One faces many challenges when writing for an instrumental competition. The piece should allow participants to display their technical proficiency while also exploring a wide range of characters and emotional situations. I have deliberately avoided the use of extended techniques. I chose not to focus on ability but musicianship; I set out on creating something fresh with only a handful of playing techniques at my disposal.

Although the cello's leading role is beyond doubt, the piano does play an important part in this composition. It expands and amplifies the cello's gestures, therefore adding a degree of power that a single instrument would not be capable of conveying by itself.

This piece has been greatly influenced by my residence at the city of Berkeley and its undisputed symbol: the bell tower or Campanile. After listening and watching to it almost every day and night, I could almost imagine its sound waves slowly taking the form of shadows, only to be shattered by every new utterance of its numerous bells.

The Campanile reminded me of one my dearest teenage years authors: Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer. In Bécquer, one finds that mystical play of light and shadow at night, where unknown shapes take possession of our innermost fears and superstitions. The hours (symbolized by bells) are an important element in his stories; they mark decisive moments and seem to announce that something terrible is about to happen. "Of Bells and Broken Shadows" does not make a literal reference to any specific story by Bécquer, it is therefore not to be considered as a programmatic composition. It simply conveys my own free associations.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge cellist Leighton Fong for his help during the final revision of this piece.

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