

The Recovery of Paradise Blackford Cello Concerto

ALISA WEILERSTEIN
CZECH PHILHARMONIC
TOMÁŠ NETOPIL



THE RECOVERY OF PARADISE

Blackford Cello Concerto

Alisa Weilerstein
cello

Czech Philharmonic

conducted by
Tomáš Netopil

**THE RECOVERY OF PARADISE:
BLACKFORD CELLO CONCERTO**

Richard Blackford (b. 1954)

**Concerto for Cello and Orchestra
“The Recovery of Paradise”**

1	I. Devil Winds of Santa Ana	7. 13
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Total playing time:		30. 00



Alisa Weilerstein,
Tomáš Netopil
& Czech Philharmonic
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While writing my cello concerto I read many articles and news bulletins about climate anomalies around the world. Extreme manifestations of the four elements of Nature (Earth, Air/Wind, Water, Fire) became the narratives for the first three movements. The final movement, inspired by the recovery of the town of Paradise, California, which was destroyed by wildfires in 2018, celebrates the resilience of the human spirit in the face of tragedy.

I Devil Winds of Santa Ana

My friend and collaborator Bernie Krause, musician and soundscape ecologist, described how in 2017 he and his wife Kat fled their home in Sonoma County, California as the wildfires known as Devil Winds destroyed everything in their path, including their home, at speeds of up to 160 mph. Having lost everything, Bernie described how he came, "face to face with the malevolent eye of global heating and its horrific consequences."

The solo cello introduces rapid, detached semiquaver patterns of different durations which immediately begin to mutate in pitch and length. As the orchestral strings intervene, the material is passed from section to section, erupting in violent orchestral outbursts. The cello weaves through the orchestra, developing and extending the opening patterns. A softer, more sustained middle section offers a reprieve from the rapid music, evoking a sleeping town that is unaware of the approaching firestorm. Its dreamlike textures are evoked by extensive use of canons. The rapid music returns and builds to a frenzy as the cello plummets to its lowest register.

II Cry The Scorched Earth

Not only photos sent by my friend of the scorched wasteland that had once been the verdant hills of Sonoma Valley, but other news bulletins from Australia, India and Greece showed desolate, parched



Richard Blackford
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landscapes that could barely support life due to drought and forest fires.

The solo cello opens with a pensive arpeggiando figure interspersed with silences. As it rises, like a wisp of smoke, an elegiac theme emerges in descending sequences that subsequently dominates the rest of the movement. Its rhythmic, melodic and harmonic development becomes increasingly agitated with each variant. The soft, rising texture returns to conclude the movement in the highest tessituras of the cello and orchestra.

III Rhyme and Rhythm of The Rain

Working in Calcutta in 1991, I remember seeing the delight on children's faces as the first monsoon rains finally arrived after the dry season. They danced, played and sang rhyming chants in the deluged streets. Even birds and domestic animals seemed to share the mood of celebration and relief. Yet the rain, so vital for their survival, in turn

threatened communities in Uttar Pradesh as well as Louisiana USA with life-threatening floods in 2021.

The short scherzo movement is a fast rondo in which the cello riffs against rhythmic orchestral ritornelli. The regular pulse, established by percussion and tapping strings, is later skewed by so-called “irrational” time signatures of 1/6 and 2/6 that create rhythmic instability. The movement climaxes with cello and orchestra alternating in loud, heavy syncopation before winding down and disappearing.

IV The Recovery Of Paradise

In November 2018 wildfires all but destroyed the town of Paradise, in the Sierra Nevada region of California. Its rebuilding is a moving story of resilience, acts of kindness and generosity, of a community uniting to recover from a natural disaster.

The final movement takes the form

of a dialogue between two themes. The solo cello presents the first – a wistful, fragile melody, marked “tenderly”, that spans thirty bars. It contrasts with a second, chorale-like theme, introduced by the orchestral brass, which is expansive, resolute, and which unites all the sections of the orchestra. After extensive development of the first theme, the second returns to conclude the concerto. The cello rises high above it in the closing bars and finally finds resolution. As the orchestra recedes, only the cello is left, softly supported by three orchestral solo celli.

Richard Blackford

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PRODUCTION TEAM

Executive producer

Renaud Loranger

Recording producer

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Sean Hickey

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Silvia Pietrosanti

A&R

Alice Lombardo

Product Management

Ana Teodorović

Press

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Distribution

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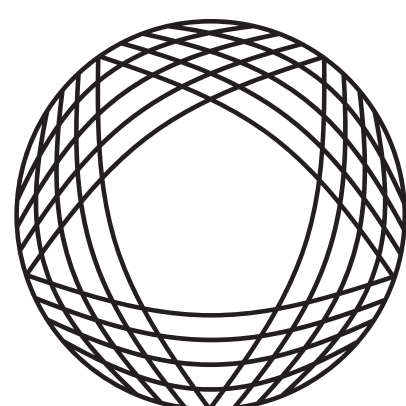
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