

# Questions of Travel

For Cello and Piano

2009

Lawrence Kramer

The title *Questions of Travel* alludes to a poem (and a book) of the same name by Elizabeth Bishop. The metaphor involved is traditional, indeed Homeric: the external voyage away from home maps a voyage of self-discovery. Although in latter-day versions the sense of discovery is often equivocal, the determination to come to terms with otherness and claim a sense of arrival is--lucky for us—almost irresistible, as Bishop's lines attest:

But surely it would have been a pity  
Not to have seen the trees along this road,  
Really exaggerated in their beauty.  
Not to have seen them gesturing  
Like noble pantomimists, dressed in pink.

The irony of the noble pantomimists is palpable, but so is the not-so-exaggerated need for them.

My own *Questions of Travel* is a musical imagining of the same troubled but finally unregretted journey. The first of the work's two movements, "In the Distance," responds to the call from afar; it traces a gradual recession in tonal and rhythmic space until the point of departure drops from the horizon. The second movement, "At the Threshold," continues the movement (adopting the tempo at which "In the Distance" arrives) in a different, more urgent tone. Its question, the true question of travel, is how to come home to oneself from a more inner distance by learning to stand still.

Both the fascinations of the two-movement format, understood as a frame for relationship, not conflict or contrast, and the cello's capacities for both lyricism and nimbleness, gave the impetus to this piece, which is about twelve and a half minutes long.

# In the Distance

♩ = 84

The musical score is written in bass clef with a common time signature (C). It consists of eight staves of music, each starting with a measure number. The first staff begins with a dynamic marking of *mp* and contains several triplet markings. The second staff continues with triplet markings and includes a fermata over a measure. The third staff starts at measure 9. The fourth staff begins at measure 14 and features a dynamic marking of *f*. The fifth staff starts at measure 19 and includes dynamic markings of *p*, *fp*, and *pp*. The sixth staff begins at measure 25 and contains dynamic markings of *p*, *mp*, and *pp*. The seventh staff starts at measure 29 and includes dynamic markings of *p*, *mp*, *f*, *mf*, *mp*, and *pp*, along with performance instructions for *pizz.* and *arco*. The eighth staff begins at measure 36 and includes dynamic markings of *mf* and *mp*.

41

*mp*

46

*f* *fp*

51

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

55

*a tempo*

61

Slower  
♩ = 72

*p*

66

pizz. arco

*p* *f* *p*

71

*p*

76

rit. a tempo rit. sul G

*fp*

81

a tempo rit. a tempo rit.

*p* *p*

# At the Threshold

♩ = 72

*p*

*mp* *mf*

*f*

*f*

*f*

*ff*

*ff*

*p*

39

5 3 3 3

44

*f* 3 3 *ff*

50

*p* *ff*

53

3 3 5

56

*p* 3 5 pizz.

68 arco

*pp* *p*

68

*mf* *f* *ff*

pizz.

72

*mf* *f* *ff*

75 arco

*mf* *f* *ff*

80

*mf* *f* *ff*

*subito p*

85

*mp* *mf* *p*

88

*f* *ff* *p*

96

*ff* *rit.*

102

*a tempo* *p* *pp*

109

5 3

*f* *pp*

116

*p* *pp* *p*

sul G sul D

123

*fp* *mp*

128

*f* *fp*

133

*fp*

sul pont. ordin.

140

*fp*