

Christopher Lee

# **Four Elements**

for low flutes

(2011)

*Four Elements* for low flutes began in 2002 with the first version of *Skywriting*, composed for my friend Karen Zocchi, a flutist and fellow student at Indiana University. At the time she was also working on Elliott Carter's *Scrivo in Vento*, which translates to "I write on the wind." This evocative phrase formed the conceptual impetus for my own small piece, which freely develops its opening melodic gesture through many changes of tempo and modal inflection. The movement was completely revised in 2004 and premiered in its current version by Abigail McKee at Rice University in Houston.

In 2009, I was asked by flutist Peter Sheridan to write a suite, including *Skywriting*, that would utilize the lowest members of the flute family, namely the alto, bass, contrabass and sub-contrabass flutes. In addition to founding the Los Angeles Flute Quartet and serving on the faculty of the University of Melbourne, Peter is one of the world's few experts on the last two instruments, which possess a haunting quality reminiscent of the cello and double bass respectively. In conceiving a unifying identity for the suite, I turned to the classical elements of earth, air, fire and water, and composed a movement for each, suggestive of their physical properties.

*Flickering Flame* is a short scherzo based on the intervals of a minor second and a minor third, and the octatonic scale that is a natural extension of these. *Subterranea (Cenotaph for Donald Erb)* utilizes many of the extended techniques, such as microtonal pitch bending and overblown harmonics, idiomatic to the sub-contrabass flute because of its unusual size and subsequently unusual sonic properties. The movement is dedicated to my teacher, Donald Erb, who died in 2008 and who had paid tribute to Edgard Varese with a *Cenotaph for E.V.* in 1979. A cenotaph is a memorial for someone buried elsewhere. This movement is built upon one of Erb's favorite melodic motives, two minor seconds that oscillate around a central pitch. The last movement of the suite, *Cerulean*, takes its conception from the image of water, which is reflected by rolling, long-flowing phrases for the contrabass flute. Formally, the movement most closely resembles a kind of sonata, with the juxtaposition and development of two contrasting thematic ideas.

-Christopher Lee

Christopher Lee studied composition at Baldwin-Wallace College (BM), Indiana University (MM), and Rice University (DMA). His music has been commissioned and performed by the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Speculum Musicae, the California EAR Unit, Analog Arts Ensemble, VOX, 20/21 Ensemble, the Enso and Kuttner string quartets, the wind ensembles of Illinois State University, Baldwin-Wallace College, the University of Alaska-Anchorage, Ohio University, and others. *Skywriting* appears in the anthology *New Music for Solo Alto or Solo Bass Flute*, published by Southeast Missouri State University. He has taught at The University of Massachusetts Lowell, Rice University and The Dana Hall School in Wellesley, Massachusetts.

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To Peter Sheridan

# Four Elements

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## I - Skywriting (for alto flute)

♩ = c. 52 Very freely throughout

Musical notation for measures 1-3. Measure 1 starts with a dynamic of *sfp*. Measures 2 and 3 contain triplets and are marked *mf*. The key signature changes from one sharp (F#) to one flat (Bb) between measures 2 and 3.

Musical notation for measures 4-5. Measure 4 starts with a dynamic of *mp*. Measures 4 and 5 contain sextuplets and are marked *f*. Measure 5 ends with a dynamic of *mp*.

Musical notation for measures 6-8. Measure 6 starts with a dynamic of *f*. Measure 7 contains a sextuplet. Measure 8 contains a triplet and is marked *f*. The key signature changes from one flat (Bb) to one sharp (F#) between measures 7 and 8. Measure 8 ends with a dynamic of *f*. The tempo marking *deliberate* is present above measure 8.

Musical notation for measures 9-10. Measure 9 starts with a dynamic of *mf*. Measure 10 contains a sextuplet and is marked *f*. The tempo marking *poco accel.* is present above measure 10.

Musical notation for measures 11-14. Measure 11 starts with a dynamic of *f*. Measure 12 contains a triplet and is marked *mp*. Measure 13 contains a triplet and is marked *mf*. Measure 14 contains a triplet and is marked *p sub.*. The tempo marking *molto accel.* is present above measure 12. The key signature changes from one sharp (F#) to one flat (Bb) between measures 13 and 14.

## II - Flickering Flame

(for bass flute)

♩.=144

*ff* *p* *mf*

5 *p* *f* *ff* *mf* *p*

9 *mf*

12

15 *f* *mf* *p*

18 *f*

N.B. - ♩ and ♩. are equal throughout when moving between duple and triple meters, unless marked otherwise.

### III - Subterranea (Cenotaph for Donald Erb) (for sub-contrabass flute)

$\text{♩} = c. 40$

(short lip bend)

key slaps

*ppp* *mp* *ppp* *mp*

(bend evenly through duration)

overblow to produce harmonics

*ppp* *f*

*ppp* *mp*

(1°)

hum into flute the pitch of last harmonic played

(2°)

*mf* *ppp*

*p*

hum unison with harmonic into flute

*f* *pp*

(1°)

*mf* *f*

*molto accel.*

$\text{♩} = c. 90$

# IV- Cerulean

(for contrabass flute)

♩=c.72

*f* 3 *mf* 3 3

4 6 6 3 *f*

7 3 6 5

10 6 6

13 *f* 3 *mf* 3

*poco rit.* ♩=c. 60

17 3 3 *f* 3

Detailed description: This is a musical score for a contrabass flute, titled "IV- Cerulean". The score is written in a single system with five staves. The first staff begins with a tempo marking of ♩=c.72 and a dynamic of *f*. It features a series of eighth-note patterns with slurs and accents, including a triplet of eighth notes. The second staff starts at measure 4 and includes a dynamic of *f*. The third staff starts at measure 7. The fourth staff starts at measure 10. The fifth staff starts at measure 13 and includes a dynamic of *f*. The score concludes with a tempo change to *poco rit.* and a new tempo marking of ♩=c. 60. The final staff starts at measure 17 and includes a dynamic of *f*. The music is characterized by complex rhythmic patterns, slurs, and accents, typical of a contemporary flute piece.