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Samuel Zyman's *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra*: An Analytical Approach*

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Abstract

A professor at The Juilliard School since 1986, Zyman is one of Mexico's foremost composers of today. His cello concerto (1990) exhibits solid technique, intense expression, and effective interaction between soloist and orchestra. The author demonstrates much stylistic and formal freedom. His *opus* mixes both antique and modern references within traditional instrumental usage and prevailing neomodal flair. One outstanding feature is the full exploitation of a basic melody to generate an interrelated musical idiom that reveals both unity and variety. The appendix contains an interview with the Mexican artist.

Keywords: Samuel Zyman, Mexican composers, Concerto for violoncello and orchestra

Resumen

Profesor en la Juilliard School desde 1986, Zyman es uno de los más distinguidos compositores mexicanos en la actualidad. Su concierto para violonchelo (1990) revela solidez técnica, profunda expresión y excelente interacción entre solista y orquesta. El autor despliega libertad estilística y formal en una obra que fusiona referencias antiguas y modernas dentro de un empleo instrumental tradicional y un predominante sabor neomodal. Una característica sobresaliente es la explotación de material melódico básico para generar un idioma musical interconectado que revela tanto unidad como variedad. El apéndice incluye una entrevista con el compositor.

Palabras claves: Samuel Zyman, compositores mexicanos, concierto para violonchelo y orquesta

Introduction

Excellently achieved, Zyman's cello concerto displays great craftsmanship and deep, alluring expression.¹ It succeeds in a large number of musical parameters –melody, harmony, texture, rhythm, form, and orchestration. The composer seems to “juggle” these aspects continuously in a creative, organic manner. This is music that immediately captures the heart of the listener and drives him or her to a stage of elevated emotions. Not at all nationalistic, its predominantly neomodal idiom has a

* To Elliott Antokoletz, extraordinary human being and most influential musicologist, in loving memory.

¹ Orchestral materials are available from the Theodore Presser Company; see <https://www.presser.com/samuel-zyman?p=2>.

global appeal. Its broad palette spans from the old to the new, from the simple to the complex, from the individual to the collective, from the human to the divine.²

One cardinal strategy is the use of basic melodic material that is fully exploited to elaborate a fantastic musical discourse. It is like a seed that grows into a magnificent tree where every part is connected: roots, branches, and leaves. Or, better yet, an embryo that contains the entire genetic information for the gestation of a human being, enabling the development of all the structures, organs, and functions. Thus, at any given point of the score, one can trace countless details associated to the nucleus. They exhibit multiple processes of variation, derivation, and transformation that evince a superior intellect capable of seizing and unfolding each particle.

The work has three movements with a total performance time of around thirty-two minutes.³ It utilizes a full symphonic instrumentation including harp and several percussion instruments. The solo and orchestral parts fully comply with their tasks. Their dialogistic relationship demonstrates antagonistic equilibrium. The ensemble flaunts both majestic *tutti* and intimate passages. The cello contrasts moments of deep lyricism with dazzling virtuoso writing. It employs a wide register and makes considerable use of double stops in all kinds of intervals. Together with the group, it participates in involved rhythmic episodes of great vitality and interest.

Zyman is internationally recognized as one of Mexico's foremost composers of today. He studied in Mexico's National Conservatory and obtained his master's and doctorate degrees in composition from The Juilliard School, where he has taught since 1986. His vast work has been performed in the United States, Mexico, Canada, Europe, and South America.⁴

The concerto was composed in 1990. It is dedicated to the Mexican cellist Carlos Prieto who gave the premiere in November of that year in Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center in New York City, with the American Symphony Orchestra conducted by Catherine Comet. On August 13, 1991, the cellist recorded it with the Mexican conductor Enrique Diemecke and Mexico's National Symphony Orchestra.⁵

The embryo concept

Melody is generally the chief element of all music. Other parameters complement it. Zyman takes this to the extreme. He exploits completely a fundamental tune, extracting its full potential to

² I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Michael von Albrecht for his most valuable editorial suggestions.

³ I. *Tranquillo e molto espressivo – Allegro molto* (17:25); II. *Lento, ma poco rubato* (8:50); III. *Allegro con spirito* (5:12). Timings are taken from Samuel Zyman, "Cello Concerto," Carlos Prieto, cello, Enrique Diemecke, conductor, National Symphony Orchestra of Mexico, Heuwell Tircuit, liner notes, PMG Classics 092102, *Cello Music from Latin America, Volume II*, 1992, compact disc.

⁴ He also holds an M.D. from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. "Samuel Zyman," The Juilliard School, <https://www.juilliard.edu/music/faculty/zyman-samuel>.

⁵ *Cello Music from Latin America, Volume II*.

the very last drop; nothing is overlooked or unemployed. From it, he derives material for each of the numerous succeeding sections: new melodic ideas, motives, rhythmic possibilities, countless voices for some of the denser textures, and endless paths for harmonic inventiveness. All of this makes for a most organic evolving of the composition process. Once the melody is grasped and enters the soul, the listener is emotionally “hooked.” He, then, feels naturally identified with it and all of its many transformations at both the conscious and subconscious levels—this last for the less obvious mutations that can only be studied through careful analysis.

One case in point

The second movement clearly exemplifies the embryo notion. Everything can be traced to the initial melody (ex. 1). This plainchant-like tune opens the movement without any accompaniment. Thus, the composer assures the audience’s undivided attention in a profound, reflexive setting.

The melody’s design reveals outstanding traits: modal language, introspective mood, wide range, organic unfolding, contrasting ideas, rhythmic diversity, expressive appoggiaturas, and the rare capability of being expressed effectively in pianissimo as well as in fortissimo (full orchestra, mm. 14–28).

Example 1: Zyman, *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra*, mvt. II, mm. 1–10.

The musical score for Example 1 is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 1–10) features a solo melody for Flute (Fl.) and Clarinet in B-flat (Cl. Bb). The tempo is marked 'Lento, ma poco rubato' with a tempo of approximately 46 beats per minute. The melody is presented in octaves. Dynamics range from *mp* (mezzo-piano) to *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *f* (forte). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and articulation marks. A 'Poco rit.' (Poco ritardando) marking is present at the end of the second system.

The tune is presented in octaves: first by flute and clarinet, then by clarinet and bassoon. This poses special implications as supposed to the use of only one solo instrument. It creates great challenges: intonation, synchronization, homogenization of character, phrasing, articulations, breathing, and volume as well as the communion among players and conductor. The latter must convey his interpretative ideas with great precision. Between this plainsong and the public’s utter concentration, there is nowhere to hide. Only musicians of the highest caliber could do justice to such a unique excerpt. It is like a prayer or a meditation of quietly intense emotional and psychological connections.

There are two contrasting ideas: “A,” mm. 1-6; and “B,” mm. 7-10. The last two measures of “B” end the phrase by smoothly bringing back the very first two measures of “A,” somewhat like a rounded binary model. This micro scheme is applied on a macro scale and becomes an important feature of the work’s formal design, especially in movements II and I. “A” uses longer values and is meditative, though not entirely free of certain restlessness. “B,” on the other hand, employs shorter values and has a more incisive, obstinate, recitative quality. Combined, they seem to embody some of the tribulations of the human spirit; from the relative peace of m. 2, they give way to the restlessness of the subsequent measures; finally, the cycle is closed by returning to the tranquility of m. 10.

The remarkably wide register spans nearly three octaves in the course of mm. 1-6. This is uncommon for most tunes, especially from any plainchant. It is more akin to Twentieth-Century practices. Pitches and dynamics, in general, go up during the “A” idea and down for the “B” part.

A good number of rhythmic values are utilized. They are complemented with a variety of articulations, slurs, and accents, all of which add interest and complexity. Syncopated rhythms are a recurrent element not only of this example but also of the whole concerto. Frequent appoggiaturas intensify key points. Notice the shifting prominence of the various beats. M. 2 has the more typical weight on beats 1 and 3. Other possibilities are explored in different measures.

The notes of the Bb major scale are used modally. Yet they are handled in order to produce harmonic ambiguity and instability. The clear moments are at the beginning and the ending, which is the D minor triad in m. 2, repeated in m. 10. Another arrival point is in the A note in m. 4; a neighboring Bb emphasizes it. The note belongs to the D minor triad and has the longest duration, occupying most of the measure. The A appears again in m. 6, now an octave higher but with a diminished duration within a 2/4 time signature. The Bb acts this time as an anacrusis to the Eb that starts the “B” idea.

Repetition of elements, with some variation, yields a more natural evolving procedure and ensures the implanting of the melody in the listener’s mind. These reiterations can be seen between mm. 1-2 and 9-10; 3-4 and 5-6; 7 and 8. There are changes in register and/or instruments. The alteration in m. 6 has already been discussed. M. 8 is a more insistent, obstinate version of m. 7. The more incisive sound and articulation of the bassoon contribute to that purpose.

The modal plainsong lines evoke olden times that appeal to the soul at a core, primitive level. The many other qualities examined before, however, are more closely associated to Twentieth-Century methods. They engender the intricacy demanded by an elaborated masterpiece. What a challenge it is for the composer to devise a melody that would constitute the primary source for an entire movement.

Some key elements have just been pointed out. One could spend much more space analyzing this melody at a microscopic level.

Second movement: the opening tutti

The initial, unusually prolonged tutti fills over one third of the entire movement (33 measures of a total of 85: three minutes and fifty seconds in length). It starts softly, like an individual prayer, and becomes tremendously powerful with the coalition of “the people” at a “biblical” scale—a full orchestral *fortissimo* (ff) is sustained from mm. 14–24, and reaches *fortississimo* (fff) in mm. 25–28. Mm. 14–30 contain the opening melody. Identifying with it from its first exposition, one feels a sudden rush of emotions giving the sensation of goosebumps when the entire ensemble takes it over in a majestic, overwhelming manner.

The passage reveals an erudite simplicity—it has been pointed out numerous times throughout history just how difficult it is to be simple yet erudite in expression. This does not demerit the intention. Quite the contrary, the effective results become ever more admirable given the economy of means: it uses only one melody and some dozen chords.

Mm. 10–13 introduce a small bridge showcasing woodwinds, timpani, and special timbric touches from the harp and the triangle above an open fifth pedal on the notes G and D. Two other notes are utilized: A and C. All the tones are drawn from the series of fifths C-G-D-A—quartal/quintal harmonies are part of the piece’s vocabulary. Measure 13 employs exclusively the G-D pedal. A huge crescendo that starts in m. 13 reaches a *fortissimo* in the following measure.

A stroke of genius is the composer’s use of the leading ideas of the tune in reverse order. Performed by trumpets and trombones, “B” bursts in mm. 14–15 after the aforementioned crescendo. It occupies only one chord integrated by the notes Eb-G-A (the note Bb occurs briefly at the end of each measure). There is a harmonic tension caused by the Eb-A tritone. A sense of insistence is provided in the accompaniment by the repeated sixteenths that complement the stubborn character of the melodic line.

Marked *Più fortissimo* and highlighted with a cymbal crash, a striking resolution to “A” in D minor emerges in mm. 16–17. Continued from the previous two measures (first violin), the note G in the second violins supplies some level of dissonance. As the descending melodic line in m. 17 naturally loses strength because of the lower register, the timpani maintains the energy with a persistent sextuplet pattern in *fortissimo* derived from “B.”

If the previous gesture (mm. 14–17) was astonishing, the composer continues to surprise us even more taking us from one crest to higher ones (mm. 16, 20, and 25). Mm. 18–19 go back to “B” and utilize the same harmony as before. However, the fragment resolves now to a fuller version of “A” in mm. 20–27. This instance starts in a higher register in the key of B minor and is delivered in massing doublings by a larger number of instruments featuring woodwinds and strings. The melodic ideas from mm. 3–4 are employed in a relentless, stirring manner in mm. 22–24. Given the escalating intensity, mm. 20–24 exhibit an increase in the harmonic rhythm, still within a relatively reduced amount of chords.

Preceded by a big *crescendo*, the ultimate climax is reached in m. 25–28 in a *fortississimo*. The extreme high and low registers are attained at that point: the double basses descend to C#₁ while the

first violins climb all the way up to C \sharp_7 . Nonetheless, the C \sharp is represented in all of the remaining octaves.

In mm. 25–26 an idea that is derived from m. 3 is executed in octaves by the imposing, penetrating sounds of trumpets and horns. They are accompanied by massing doublings of the note C \sharp followed by its neighboring note B and returning to the C \sharp again. Somewhat subdued—the composer wishes to stress the main line in octaves—perfect fourths and fifths appear by the use of the notes G \sharp and F \sharp . The excerpt has a most attractive, primitive sound. It is contrasted by a modern coloristic progression played by the brass in mm. 27 (the chord G-D-A-E progresses to a G \sharp minor triad) that leads to the full orchestra's triumphant Bb major in m. 28 (preceded by a sixteenth anacrusis in m. 27). This major triad clearly stands out because of the previous, prevailing minor modes.

A held D by the horn in mm. 28–30 accomplishes some quasi-unfeasible feats, for example, the astoundingly brief but effective musical phase-out in record time: from *fff* in m. 28 down to *mp* in the following measure. Harmonically, it maintains a common tone that blends perfectly with the return of the opening material from mm. 1–2. This reinstatement features a different color achieved by the use of oboe and bassoon instead of the original combination of flute and clarinet.

In mm. 30–33, the *tutti* concludes with a version of the bridge from mm. 10–13. At last, the soloist makes his entrance in m. 33. Based on the initial melodic material of mm. 1–10, the cello fills up the rest of the movement, except for brief orchestral interludes in mm. 66–72 and 78–81. The last three measures of the movement (mm. 83–85) end rather unconventionally. The solo cello quietly plays in pizzicato without any accompaniment. Only two notes are employed in the last two measures: the tonic Eb (an Eb pedal stretches from m. 78 to the very end) and its perfect fifth Bb. The very last note is a whole note Bb $_4$.

For the extended cello discourse the primary melody provides a fertile soil where the composer exercises his creativity exploring endless musical possibilities.

The round up model

The second movement displays several occurrences of rounding schemes: that is the restatement of elements at both micro and macro scales. They convey a feeling of completion, of organic symmetry. The prime melody opens and closes with the phrase in mm. 1–2 and 9–10. The phrase returns again in the same key and register in mm. 29–30. The bridge in mm. 10–13 that gives way to the *ff* section is also the one that winds it up and prepares the soloist entrance (mm. 31–33). In a broader scope, the soloist rounds up the material of the *tutti*. This establishes a simple formal outline that is quite effective.

The grander gestures have been pointed out in a general fashion. There are more details to this clever *tutti* that won't be covered due to the length limit of this paper. One instance is the tempo markings that enhance the overall result. With varying degrees of subtleties, other aspects include countless peculiarities in orchestration, harmony, articulations, slurs, accents, dynamics, expression indications, etc.

Another case in point

The next case has even more far-reaching repercussions: we are referring to the modal melody that opens the concerto. This “cell” is fully “divided” to produce vast amounts of materials.

Again, there are two components: “A,” mm. 5–14; and “B,” mm. 15–20 (ex. 2). Of meditative nature, “A” is a self-contained melody with a fairly traditional use of phrases that integrate a period. Once more, elements of repetition and variation as well as the use of syncopations can be observed. With an obstinate, reiterative character, “B” has an improvisatory quality that stems from further elaborations of “A.” It serves as a bridge for the restatement of “A” by the oboe starting in m. 19. The oboe version leads to a crescendo that involves most of the orchestra in mm. 30–34. The *fortissimo* reached in m. 34 is followed by a *decrescendo* in m. 36. The lower voice of the celli deliver and anguish rendering where the F natural, originally utilized in m. 6, is substituted by an F#, thus creating tensional tritones that are part of the diminished harmony F#-A-C-Eb in mm. 37–40. The first *tutti* ends quietly in the key of G minor, mm. 44–51. Then, based on the primary tune, an uncommonly placed cello cadenza spans mm. 50–83.

Example 2: Zyman, *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra*, mvt. I, mm. 1–20.

CONCIERTO PARA CELLO Y ORQUESTA
Tranquillo e molto espressivo 3/4 I. I. solo Samuel Zyman

2 Fl. II (II or Picc) *mp* *mf* *f* *p*

Fl. *mf* *f* *p*

Fl. *f* *mp*

The apparently simple fragment in example 3 introduces crucial elements and provides insight into some of the composer’s procedures. Many of the observations made for the prior case of the second movement apply here as well. The carefully designed melody is presented in a setting that ensures the listener awareness. The varied reaffirmations performed in turn by flute, oboe, cello, and soloist (starting in m. 5, 19, 37, and 50, respectively) embed it deeply in the heart, and envision a stage of fantasy and creativity. Abundant material will be derived from every element that constitutes this passage.

The ostinato accompaniment in the strings remains unchanged for a long time, mm. 1–22.⁶ This repetitive pattern sets up a meditative atmosphere that invokes deep human, spiritual undertones. The pizzicato on the lower strings seems to imitate a slow heart’s pounding—a nice effect is obtained by allowing the string to continue vibrating after the second pluck (see slur).

⁶ Only the viola part has small changes in mm. 19–22.

Example 3: Zyman, Concerto for Cello and Orchestra, mvt. 1, mm. 1-7.

CONCIERTO PARA CELLO Y ORQUESTA
Tranquillo e molto espressivo $\text{♩} = c. 69$ I. I. Solo Samuel Zyman

2 Fl. I, II
(II or Picc.)
2 Ob. I, II
2 Cl. I, II
2 Bn. I, II
Horns I, II, III, IV
in F
2 Tpts. I, II
in C
Tubs. I, II, III
Tuba
Timp
Perc
Harp
cello solo
VI
VII
vla.
Cell.
D.B.

Handwritten musical notation and dynamics (mp, p, pp) are present throughout the score.

As has already been mentioned, syncopations, introduced in the very first measure, are a cardinal rhythmic element of the whole piece. The flowing violin's syncopated figures offer contrast to the most static, on-the-beat lower string parts—observe also the juxtaposition of bow vs. pizzicato among these instrumental groups. In m. 2, the violins reach and hold a dotted half note value. There, a horn interacts with a pattern that introduces sixteenths. This idea is then used by the flute at the end of “A” in m. 12, and becomes the central material of “B” in mm. 15–17.

The prevailing harmony is D minor in root position. The triad lacks the F natural in the first measure for a more primal sound. Within this archaic feel, when the first violins reach the F in m. 2, the seconds create a perfect fifth by supplying a Bb note. An unexpected Bb major chord is formed, creating harmonic contrast—otherwise, it would be less stimulating to have the D minor harmony the entire time. The French horn note A functions in both the D minor and Bb major chords, within the latter as an alluring major seventh—in fact the Bb⁷ chord contains both triads.

The flute melody has remarkable details. Nonetheless, we will concentrate on those that have more harmonic implications. Many focal notes are not confined to the limits of the basic triads in the accompaniment. They draw attention, create interest, and ultimately generate successful channels of expression. Among them, one should mention the very first C in m. 5, the Bb in m. 9, the E in mm. 10–12 and its resolution in mm. 12–14.

The C is a longing seventh that conveys a mood of nostalgia and meditation. Notice the significant appoggiatura in m. 7. Discard it, and much would be lost.

The arrival of the Bb (m. 9) and its previous descending line may give the impression to call for a modulation that never materializes. Several measures later, when this same Bb occurs in the oboe, the desired, long-awaited modulation finally takes place in m. 23 with the first harmonic modification in the ostinato since the beginning. The change is a most conspicuous event. After two chords (A minor, G minor), the harmony goes back to D minor in m. 26.

The note E causes greater harmonic clashes with the alternating D minor-Bb major context. It stubbornly hangs there through mm. 10–12. Its syncopated rhythms emphasize a sense of persistent longing. The resolution in mm. 12–13 is somewhat harmonically off because it implies an A minor over the D minor ostinato.

Some of the procedures in the previous cases are essential to the work; they include neomodality, syncopation, round up schemes, economy of means, harmonic sobriety, *ostinati*, long pedals, etc. Old-like elements are contrasted with Twentieth-Century techniques. Harmonically, modern tonal, chromatic, quartal/quintal progressions, and the use of tensional tritones offer contrast to the prevailing minor, modal atmosphere.

Melodic derivations

Melodic material derived from the opening (mm. 1–20; ex. 2 and 3) permeates the whole concerto, especially movements I and III. Most of this substance results from variation, transformation, motivic, and cyclic methods applied to the primary sources (see ex. 4). Some are easy to spot, others are less obvious. The relations to the second movement are subtler. More than full-

blown melodies, particles are employed by themselves or combined, like building blocks, to construct longer ideas.

Example 4: Zyman, *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra*, melodic chart.⁷

MOVEMENT I

X1. mm. 84–86.



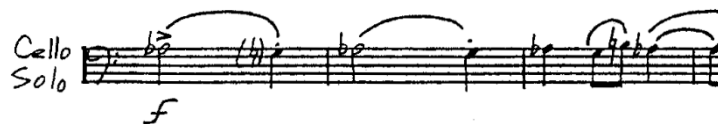
X2. mm. 92–93.



X3. mm. 143–144.



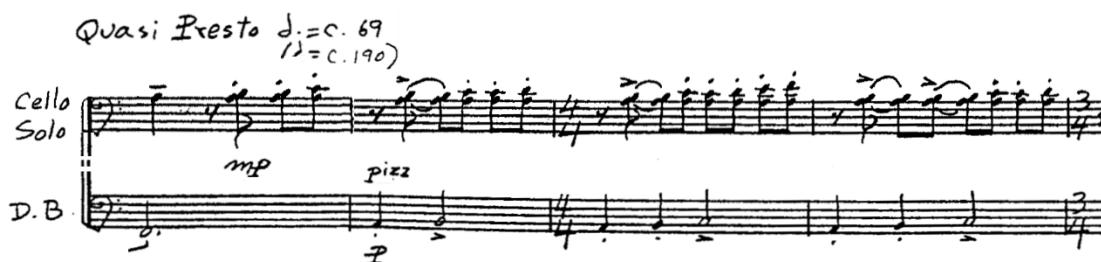
X4. mm. 150–152.



X5. mm. 212–213.

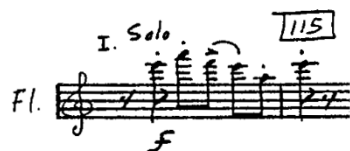


X6. mm. 225–228.



⁷ To save space, the chief ideas shown in the previous examples are excluded here.

X7. mm. 114–115.

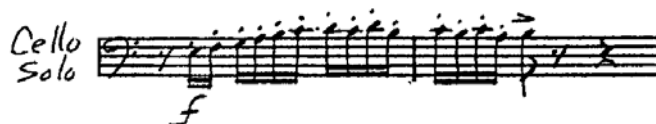


MOVEMENT III

Y1. mm. 1–5.



Y2a. mm. 24–25.



Y2b. mm. 34–37.



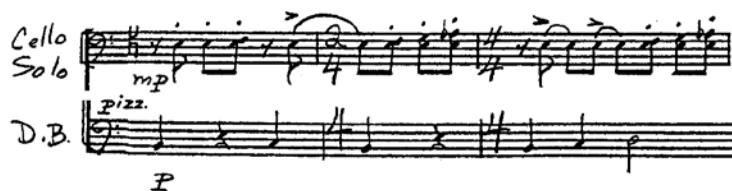
Y3. mm. 51–52.



Y4. mm. 73–75.



Y5. mm. 116–118.



First movement

X5 is clearly derived from mm. 5-6 (see ex. 2). A quarter note silence in m. 212 reduces the duration of the first note. Because of the use of C natural instead of a C# in m. 213, the intervallic content has been modified as compared to that of mm. 5-6. This scalar line is exploited profusely both in descending and ascending directions as well as with intervallic changes and thrilling rhythmic displacements throughout the movement.

A transitional figure, X3 resembles the notes in beats 2 and 3 of m. 6 (see ex. 2).

X1 develops from m. 15 (see ex. 2). It launches a new contrasting section of exciting action in the faster *Allegro molto tempo* starting in m. 84. The last beat of m. 86 uses the three-note cell E-F-G that is later utilized in various intervallic changes and transpositions (see example 8, violins and violas). It actually stems from the three-note cell D-E-F in mm. 1-2 (see ex. 3, first violins).

X2 is a less obvious derivation but a most recurring one. The outstanding, enduring quality of this motive is its rhythm. Its intervals change, as does the direction of its resolution, that is, the last note can move upwards or downwards. The rhythm may be traced to m. 1 by substituting the first three eighths for a dotted quarter note (see ex. 3, violins).

With longer values and a cantabile spirit, the contrasting X4 is also a branch of the three-note cell concept. This is one of the most important, prevailing melodic materials. Observe the insistent, reiterative character of X4 that is in tune with one of the representative features of the concerto; detect the repetitions of its main note Ab.

X6 is also based on the three-note cell. It gives rise to extended contrasting sections of inciting, intricate rhythmic complexities. The cell A-B-C is first seen in the solo part in m. 225. It comes into view in a more persistent fashion in the first violins, cellos, and basses in mm. 226-228 (only the bass part is shown).

There are other smaller transitional figures like X7, which is devised from the intervallic matter of the three-note horn call in m. 2: E-F-A (see ex. 3).

As previously mentioned, particles are employed in combinations to produce longer ideas. Example 5a is a composite sequence that originates from X2 and a comprised version of X3. An expressive violin solo takes place in mm. 295-308 (partially shown in ex. 5b). It grows from previous ideas. Its beginning is equivalent to m. 17 (see ex. 2) but transposed down a perfect fourth and with rhythmic augmentation.

Example 5a: Zyman, *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra*, mvt. I, mm. 258-261.



Example 5b: Zyman, *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra*, mvt. I, mm. 295–298.



Third movement

The third movement exhibits much melodic connections to the first one. There are further derivations but, especially, returns. In a way, the whole third movement is like a big return –though abbreviated. In fact, many elements even come back mostly in the same order they were introduced in the first movement. The third movement also shares the prevailing 3/4 time signature of the first movement's *Allegro*.

Y1 is derived from X1. Played by four horns in unison, this idea yields a vibrant, powerful introduction in 4/4 meter (mm. 1–16) that offers great contrast to the previous movements as well as much harmonic and rhythmic vitality. The chief 3/4 meter starts in m. 17.

Y2a shows the soloist entrance. The material is crafted from m. 86 of X1. The cello is accompanied by a timpani ostinato on the note E that covers mm. 21–50. Within a light texture there are also some alternated participations of woodwinds, brasses, and harp. All of this section is grounded on X1.

Y2b comes from mm. 84–85 of X1. The cello does an extended version to close the section in mm. 47–51.

A new section featuring Y3 begins in m. 51. Y3 corresponds to X2. The solo part in mm. 51–61 of movt. III is identical to that of mm. 132–142 of movt. I. For the sake of interest, the orchestration, of course, is not.

Y4 is a transformation of X4. Notice the reiterations of the principal note: Eb in Y4; Ab in X4. Like X4, Y4 fills out a considerable number of measures. In fact, it occupies the prolonged final section of the movement.

Y5 brings back the rhythmic section formulated by X6. Among other discrepancies, the three-note cell in the bass (B-C-D) is one step higher and with an altered intervallic content from the original (A-B-C). X6 is quite lengthy and has two enlarged appearances starting in m. 225 and in m. 446. Y5 is a reduced version that only arises in mm. 116–128.

An entire section of the first movement (mm. 294–317) that includes the violin solo and its subsequent material resurfaces unchanged in the third movement (mm. 129–152).

Similar to the first movement, in the third one there are also some transitional figures like the one starting in m. 17 which is based on the perfect fifths A-E-B, or the one that revolves around the notes C-D-Eb-F in mm. 190–200 right before the G.P. (Grand Pause) that precedes the last Y4 section.

Orchestration

The concerto displays a modern, brilliant orchestration. It utilizes a complete instrumentation that consists of piccolo, woodwinds in pairs, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, suspended cymbal, bass drum, snare drum, triangle, gong, chimes, harp, and strings. Without extended techniques and within traditional instrumental usage, all of these resources are skillfully handled. As in other parameters, one perceives the composer's intention to get the most out of the orchestra in every section and to take advantage of its wide palette of colors. Each instrumental family is fully exploited. Impressive *tutti* and numerous *sol*i and, especially, solos by both customary (flute, oboe, horn, violin) and less common instruments (viola, tuba) are flaunted throughout. A full dynamic range from *ppp* to *fff* is employed. Certain influences from Twentieth-Century USA symphonic traits can be felt.

In tune with Twentieth-Century practices, the orchestra is not just a mere accompanist but an equal partner. For instance, the soloist participation, either by itself or together with the orchestra, reach an approximate of 59% of the whole piece.⁸ The orchestra alone takes the remaining 41%, a rather high sum, not that far from a 50/50 equilibrium. This allows for very active exchanges with the soloist as well as for some majestic *tutti* and orchestral interjections. In fact, each movement starts with an ample *tutti*.

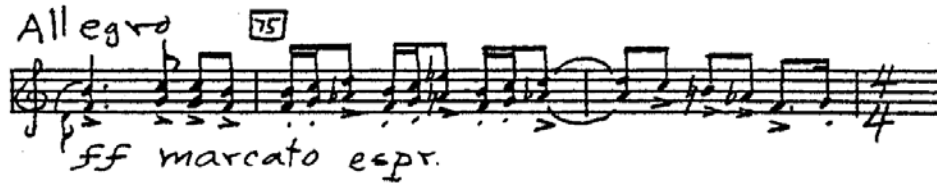
The dialogistic relationship between soloist and orchestra is quite balanced. The initial *tutti* of the first movement is replicated by the soloist at the end of the movement. An analogous case happens in the second movement. The cello answer, however, spans the longer part of that movement.

On the other hand, the ensemble interacts with the soloist in many ways. In addition to the orchestral openings, an unusual number of *tutti* of varying dimensions frequently come into view within each one of the movements giving the soloist good opportunities to rest. The cello is constantly accompanied or confronted by diverse orchestral dispositions: specific instrumental families, miscellaneous combinations, or even solos and *sol*i from different instruments. In sections of the second movement, the double basses playing quarter notes in pizzicato provide a unique accompaniment in the manner of a “walking bass” that recalls some of Bach's related procedures. In the last movement, a surprising timpani rhythmic ostinato is the fundamental accompaniment in bars 21-50.

As demanded by the genre, the solo part is most challenging both technically and musically. It fluctuates from poetic moods to dazzling virtuoso passages without compromising musical substance. It does have a significant amount of double stops in all kinds of intervals. Some, like the ones in example 6 (*cadenza*), demand a less conventional fingering approach. Observe the prevalence of tritones. Others, like the ones in Y5 and example 7, are quite difficult and unidiomatic. They seem more apt for the piano. Other challenges arise from the employment of a wide register, considerable skips, emotional cantabile, fast passagework, and the use of various bow strokes including, *legato*, *détaché*, and *spiccato*.

⁸ Movements: I. 56.7%, II. 51.8%, and III. 68.2%.

Example 6: Zyman, *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra*, mvt. I, cadenza, mm. 74–76.



Example 7: Zyman, *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra*, mvt. I, mm. 238–241.



Texture

A wide array of textures are utilized, from the basic to the complex: tunes executed either solo or in unison; a melody with varying degrees of intricacy in the accompaniment; and rich contrapuntal settings.

The outstanding qualities of the plainchant-like melody that start the second movement have already been discussed (ex. 1), as well as the opening of the first movement with its lyric melody and its moderately elaborate accompaniment (ex. 3).

More complicated textures are also an important part of the concerto's idiom. One recurring device is canonic imitation, mostly at the octave and with a time interval of a quarter note, see examples 8 (mm. 92–93), 10 (longer time interval), 12a (mm. 258–259), and 12b (mm. 266–267). Examples 8, 9, and 10 display a vital contrapuntal and rhythmic saturation.

Example 8: Zyman, Concerto for Cello and Orchestra, mvt. I, mm. 90-93.

90 *Accel.----- Piu mosso ♩ = c. 160*

Fl. *f*

Ob. *f*

Cl. B \flat *f*

Bn. *f marcato*

Hrns. I, II, III, IV *f*

Tpts. *f*

Trbs. I, II, III, Tuba *f*

Timp. *ff*

SD Perc. *mf*

Susp cymb. *f*

Harp

Cello Solo *Accel.----- Piu mosso ♩ = c. 160*

VI *ff marcato*

VII *ff marcato*

Vla *ff marcato*

Cell. *ff marcato*

D.B. *f marcato*

Rhythm

Rhythm is a crucial element that is constantly cultivated. The methods employed are not avant-garde. They resemble more closely those of the early Twentieth Century. Nevertheless, the skillful use of conservative rhythmic components and tactics effectively contributes interest to the music.

The chief meters are: 3/4 for the first and last movements and 4/4 for the second one. They are occasionally alternated with other meters to accommodate deliberate melodic irregularities: 2/4 and 4/4 in the outer movements; 2/4, 3/4, and 5/4 in the middle one. Sporadically, quarter note duplets, triplets, and quadruplets are also used.

A wide range of *tempi* are utilized, from quarter=42 (mvt. II) all the way up to quarter=190 (mvt. I) or even dotted half=84 (mvt. I). The first movement is the one with the most changes of speed. It begins and ends slow, with the quarter=69 (*Tranquillo e molto espressivo*). The main *Allegro molto* starts at quarter = 138. With the increasing sense of intensity and agitation of the music comes a series of *accelerandi* that reach ever-faster *tempi*.

There are a number of frequent features associated with cross rhythms: syncopation, irregular accentuation, emphasis on unusual beats, off-beats, and sesquialtera. Syncopations are practically found in every page of the score. They are an intrinsic expressive element of the concerto's idiom and can be spotted in the enclosed examples.

Example 9 contains many of the above-cited elements. The result is a most exciting rhythmic passage full of action. Irregular accentuation is especially visible in the solo part as well as in the first violins. Stress on different beats can also be appreciated in the solo part: beat one, mm. 167–168; beat two, mm. 163–164, and beat three, m. 165. The soloist's forceful octaves on beat two in mm. 163–164 are answered with a reaction on beat three by violas, horns, and clarinets. Syncopations are supplied by basses, cellos, violas, second violins, timpani, and first horn. Off-beat entrances are almost everywhere. A remarkable disposition, in terms of texture and orchestration, is the one in mm. 167–168 where only the soloist provides the downbeat while the ensemble responds with accented off-beats. The contrasting lyrical melody of the oboe soars nicely on top of the intricate rhythmic-melodic lines below.

Example 9: Zyman, Concerto for Cello and Orchestra, mvt. I, mm. 162–168.

165

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. The top staves include woodwinds (Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in Bb, Bassoon) and brass (Horns I-IV, Trumpets, Trombones I-III, Tuba). Below these are the percussion section (Timpani, Snare Drum, Percussion) and the Harp. The bottom section features the string ensemble, including Violins I & II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The Cello Solo part is prominently featured with various dynamic markings such as *ff*, *mp*, and *fmp*, and articulation like *arco* and *pizz*. The Double Bass part also includes dynamic markings like *fmp* and *p*. The score is written in a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature.

X2 is another case of weight on atypical beats (see ex. 4). It always starts in the second beat as a powerful reaction to a strong downbeat. This creates a more enticing sensation of opposition, drama, and struggle than if this motif were located on beat 1. Furthermore, in its first appearance, starting in m. 92, it is presented in a canonic setting at the octave and with a time interval of a quarter note (see ex. 8). The secondary voice has an accented entrance in the third beat. Other prominent cases of stress on different beats can be found in examples 4 (X2, X3, X5, X6, Y1, Y2a, Y3, Y4), 11, 12a, and 12b.

A sesquialtera rhythmic scheme is seen in example 10, mm. 84–85, violins and violas. In m. 85, the accentuation in the violins suggest a 6/8 meter that causes a cross rhythm with the prevailing 3/4 meter of the violas; a two against three relationship is created. This also occurs in m. 84 but with the violas implying the 6/8 meter.

Example 10: Zyman, *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra*, mvt. I, mm. 84–86.

The image displays a musical score for measures 84, 85, and 86 of Zyman's *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra*, first movement. The score is written for five parts: Violin I (V I), Violin II (V II), Viola (Vla), Cello (Cell.), and Double Bass (D. B.). The time signature is 3/4. Measures 84 and 85 feature a complex rhythmic interplay between the strings, with accents and dynamic markings like *ff* and *sfz*. Measure 86 shows a continuation of the rhythmic patterns with a final *sfz* marking.

Form

The form is approached with freedom. It does not depend on the traditional structures of tonal music, not formally, harmonically, or thematically. There is not a main key for the whole piece as in the case of the D major violin concertos of Beethoven, Brahms, and Tchaikovsky, to name but a few. In fact, each movement starts in one key and ends in a different one (I: D minor, G minor; II: D minor, open fifth Eb-Bb; III: G quartal, open fifth Bb-F). Thematically, the two contrasting tunes of a sonata form are not present nor is the returning melody of a rondo or the theme and variations scheme. In this case, several melodic ideas are derived from one central tune. These ideas by themselves or combined yield distinct sections of varying characters. Thus, the form is quite flexible and lends itself to greater inventiveness and creativity.

One outstanding principle is derived from the rounded form: that is the restatement of elements at both micro and macro scales. These returns convey a sense of completion, of organic symmetry. In the second movement, the prime melody opens and closes with exactly the same material (Ex. 1, mm. 1–2 and 9–10). In a broader scope, the initial orchestral *tutti* is then reinstated

with some changes by the soloist to finish the movement. This establishes a simple formal outline that is yet very effective due to its clarity, simplicity, and ease for the public to follow. It also allows for much inventiveness in the soloist version.

A similar case takes place in the first movement. The prolonged, slow *tutti* that opens the movement is also employed to close it, but, in the latter case, with the soloist executing all the melodic lines. This return happens in the same tempo, key, and extension as the original one. The result is an arch form that surrounds the contrasting *allegro* sections and wraps up the whole movement. In an arch of an even bigger scale, the whole third movement brings back ideas from the first one; some are literally repeated, others introduce some forms of variation, and there are also new ideas that are derived from those of the first movement.

There are of course atypical features that are part of the flexibility and freedom of form. The first two movements end slowly and softly. The second one concludes most uncommonly with the soloist playing in *pizzicato* without any accompaniment. A *fortississimo* ending only occurs in the last movement.

Each of the three movements starts with a large *tutti*. In the first movement of a symphony or a concerto it is not rare to have a slow introduction followed by the chief *allegro tempo*. Here, however, the slow opening *tutti* is quite lengthy. It is followed by an unusually located *cadenza* of dominating slow tempo and spiritual quality. Furthermore, after the core *allegro* sections, the material of the opening *tutti* fully returns. The slow sections represent, then, a generous part of the movement.

Another point is the fact that in many concertos of the 18th and 19th centuries the opening *tutti* introduces the main themes. In this case, though, the first movement's *tutti* focuses on just one melody of which its part "A" is reiterated three times. This melodic material is developed in the *cadenza* and restated by the soloist in the final section.

At first, the second movement may just as well give the impression of a symphony rather than a concerto. The initial *tutti* lasts almost four minutes and occupies a little over one third of the entire movement. It is most expressive and goes from *piano* to *fortississimo*. The composer displays the orchestra at its fullest. This might proclaim the protagonistic equality of orchestra and soloist, which is much in tune with concertos of the Twentieth Century where the orchestra is no longer just a mere accompanist but a full dialogistic partner.

The introductory *tutti* of the third movement is not as extended as those of the previous movements. Nonetheless, it still fills some twenty bars. Fewer concertos have such a substantial *tutti* at the beginning of the final movement. One illustration that comes to mind is Bruch's *Violin Concerto no. 1*. Perhaps this compensates for the fact that in Bruch's concerto the orchestral opening of the first movement and the connecting bridge to the second employ only a few bars.

Harmony

The appealing harmonic treatment reveals wisdom and creativity. Modality in minor keys prevails. A number of elements are occupied to create contrast, diversity, and complexity, especially

open fifths, diminished chords with distinct highlighting of tritones, and quartal harmonies. In addition, there are some chromatic sequences, coloristic progressions, chromatic mediant relationships, and the use of seventh, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth chords. The controlled use of dissonance, both harmonically and melodically (prominence on notes outside the accompanying chords) becomes an important expressive resource; in special places, multiple dissonances yield dense, complicated passages. The clashes with the harmony of several notes of the melody of example 2 (C, Bb, and E) were already discussed.

One outstanding aspect is the remarkable results the composer obtains with a clever economy of means; in this case, the proverb “less is more” holds true. A particularly slow harmonic rhythm is frequently encountered. There are incredibly powerful passages that utilize only a handful of chords. The initial *tutti* of the second movement lasts close to four minutes and only employs some dozen chords.

A strategy often applied is to keep a specific harmony constant, static. Then, when a change finally emerges, it becomes a most conspicuous event, a big, meaningful gesture. For instance, the rhythmic and harmonic ostinato at the beginning of the first movement remains unvarying for twenty-two measures, which is over one minute.

There are of course incredibly long pedals. On the note C, the most extended one spans from m. 360 to m. 435 of the first movement for a total of 76 measures, which represents 12.4% of the entire movement.⁹ It is situated amid two intense, agitated sections, in order to calm things down. The prolonged harmonies, here and in other passages, provide a primitive sensation of vastness; on a subjective level one may envision great plateaus, steppes, mountains

There is an engaging primal clarity that captures the listener’s imagination and stirs his emotions. Much variety of colors and moods is found throughout the use of church modes and open fifths that invoke olden sounds of darker patina (examples 3, 10, and 12a [mm. 258–259]); tritones and diminished chords give a sense of anguish, tension, and/or struggle (examples 6 and 8 [mm. 92–93]); quartal chords have a modern flavor as seen in example 11.

The third movement opens with a dynamic passage where quartal sounds from the series of perfect fourths D-G-C-F are clearly perceived both harmonically and melodically in mm. 1–4 (ex. 11). A refreshing change occurs in mm. 5–8 where a sudden instrumentation switch and a different set of perfect fourths are presented: C#-F#-B-E-A. In mm. 1–8 there are no foreign notes outside the involving series of perfect fourths; the quartal sound becomes quite evident. Brass instruments are especially featured in this brilliant introduction (mm. 1–17) that shows much influence from USA symphonic practices. Notice the melodic emphasis on beat two that reacts to the strong downbeat provided by timpani and strings. Observe also the irregular accentuation in m. 5.

⁹ At times, the note G is added to the pedal. In mm. 386–389, 420–423, and 428–431, the C pedal takes place also with rhythmic patterns.

Example 11: Zyman, Concerto for Cello and Orchestra, mvt. III, mm. 1–5.

III.

Allegro con spirito
(alla breve $d = c. 84$)

Fl. a 2 5

Ob. a 2 5

Cl. B \flat a 2 5

Bn. a 2 5

Hrns. a 2 (I & III)

Tpts. a 2 (III & IV)

Trbs. III

Timp.

Perc.

Har-p.

Allegro con spirito
(alla breve $d = c. 84$)

Cello Solo

VI

VII

Vla.

Cell.

D.B.

Quartal tactics using the main series A-D-G can also be appreciated in example 10. These notes appear on an imitative counterpoint among first violins and violas, mm. 84–85. A pedal on open fifths/fourths with the notes D and A supplied by oboes, clarinets, and bassoons along with rhythmic interactions with these two notes by the strings provides the harmonic accompaniment.

Changing relationships between bass and melody are a recurrent expressive resource as shown in examples 12a and 12b. These examples are part of a dramatic passage that utilizes X2 in canonic counterpoint. In example 12a, the first note of X2 (A, m. 258, beat 2), concurs with the bass pedal. In example 12b, the corresponding voices (m. 266) clash with the dissonance created with the notes D (bass) and Eb (X2). Several factors contribute to the increased intensity of example 12b: the cited dissonance; a louder dynamic; a wider register (the bass descends while the melody goes to the highest octaves, especially the piccolo); more instruments delivering X2; and the presence of the tritone in the last two notes of this motivic idea, Eb-A (m. 267, beats two and three).

Example 12a: Zyman, Concerto for Cello and Orchestra, mvt. I, mm. 257–259.

Handwritten musical score for Example 12a, showing measures 257–259. The score is written for various instruments, including Flute (Fl), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in B-flat (Cl. B \flat), Bassoon (Bn.), Horns (Hrns. I, II, III, IV), Trumpets (Tpts), Trombones (Trbs), Timpani (Timp), Percussion (Perc.), Harp, Cello Solo, Violin I (VI), Violin II (VII), Viola (Vla), Cello (Cell), and Double Bass (D.B.). The notation includes notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as *f* (forte) and *arco* (arco). A handwritten box labeled "260" is present above the Flute staff in measure 259. The score is written in a single system, with measures 257, 258, and 259 indicated by the measure numbers at the beginning of each staff.

Example 12b: Zyman, Concerto for Cello and Orchestra, mvt. I, mm. 264–267.

Handwritten musical score for Example 12b, showing measures 264–267. The score is written for a full orchestra and includes the following instruments and parts:

- Fl. I (Sounding an 8ve higher) & Picc.
- Ob.
- Cl. Bb
- Bn.
- Hrns. I, II, III, IV
- Tpts.
- Tbbs.
- Tuba
- Timpani (Timp)
- Percussion (Perc)
- Harp
- Cello Solo
- Violin I (VI)
- Violin II (VII)
- Viola (Vla)
- Cello (Cell)
- Double Bass (D.B.)

The score is marked with measure numbers 264, 265, and 266. Dynamics include *ff* (fortissimo) and *a2* (second attack). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and articulation marks.

A valuable characteristic is the composer's careful differentiation of each chord member's power. It is like a pianist who stresses some specific notes in a chord by varying the force of attack on the keys, thus obtaining distinctive gradations of color. Zyman's concerto ends with the open fifth Bb-F. The vast majority of the orchestra plays the Bb. Only one trombone and two horns execute the F. The ear identifies the unison Bb as the dominating force with the addition of a subdued, harmonic-like presence of the F.

This method is especially applied to highlight or disguise dissonant chord members by means of weight (number and types of instruments), register, and spacing. A most conspicuous minor second, A-Bb, is played by the horns in mm. 110–113 of the first movement. On the other hand, in mm. 14–15 of the second movement, the members of the prevailing dyad Eb-G are performed by the whole orchestra except for the horns and part of the violins that provide a mildly dissonant A that obviously adds interest to the otherwise plain dyad.

The aforementioned slow harmonic rhythm must be complemented with other parameters: melody, rhythm, texture, and orchestration. Perhaps, this partially explains the composer's concern to constantly and simultaneously maintain attention and inventiveness in those parameters. A contrasting approach can be seen in Frederick Delius's "On Hearing the First Cuckoo in spring (Introducing a Norwegian Folk Song)." Its simple, repetitive folk-like tunes and rhythms are brought to life by a lush multicolored harmony of extremely fast harmonic rhythm and density that can have numerous chords in every bar. The harmony, next to the orchestration, stands out as one of the key elements of this music. One can sense that the English composer devotes a great part of his efforts to these aspects with effective results.

Samuel Zyman's cello concerto is a deeply expressive and expertly crafted composition. It exhibits inspired creativity and superior technique in every facet. The author chooses an esthetic path that demonstrates freedom of style and form as well as an original, personal language that claims its own place among the countless musical currents of the end of the Twentieth Century. One cardinal strategy is that of creating an ambitious musical discourse by extracting and developing every possible idea from a few primary plainchant-like tunes. Melodic variation and transformation as well as motivic and cyclic procedures play a vital role within the organic unfolding of the *opus*. Both the cello and the orchestra parts are skillfully written; their dynamic dialogistic relationship appeals to performers and audiences alike. The breadth and quality of this essay of sounds deserves more attention and divulgation through performances and recordings.

Appendix

Samuel Zyman's Cello Concerto: An Interview by Jorge Barrón

JB: Why write a cello concerto?

SZ: It was a joint commission from Carlos Prieto and the company Absolut Vodka. The initial idea came from Prieto, whom I already knew. Later, the cited company invited me to take part of what they called the Absolut Concerto, an event where new works were to be performed in Avery Fisher Hall by the American Symphony Orchestra conducted by Catherine Comet.

JB: What were your personal and professional circumstances at that time?

SZ: I had recently completed my doctorate at The Juilliard School, where I was also teaching part time. By then I had already composed a woodwind quintet and a number of orchestral works, including a piano concerto, a piece titled *Soliloquio* for orchestra, and my first symphony.

JB: What significance did the cello concerto have in your career?

SZ: It was a watershed. For the first time, a work of mine had major exposure and was to be played by top performers in important venues in both New York City and Mexico City.

JB: What place of importance does this work occupy within your catalogue?

SZ: A most important one, because it is the work that introduced me in a more visible way in the cities already mentioned.

JB: How long did it take you to complete it?

SZ: I do not recall exactly, but I believe that some eight or nine months. I began it in 1989 and finished in 1990 under tremendous pressure due to the looming deadline for the concert. Writing for orchestra is difficult, and I did not have as much experience doing it at the time. In addition, without the aid of computers, in those days, the initial score had to be written by hand using a pencil so as to be able to make corrections. It certainly was very intense work that took me a lot of time.

JB: Had you written for the cello before?

SZ: Not as a soloist, only in the context of orchestral pieces. Since then, I have composed various works for this instrument.

JB: Was it difficult?

SZ: Yes, it was. I had certain doubts, especially regarding double stops. In fact, I used a considerable number of them initially. However, I later had to eliminate some of them, following Prieto's suggestions, in order to gain fluidity in the melodic line.

JB: With so many aesthetic trends in the Twentieth Century, what decisions did you make about style?

SZ: That question is fundamental. At that time, the vast majority of composers were writing avant-garde music: dodecaphonic, experimental, with unconventional notations and unusual manners of using the instruments, among countless other oddities and innovations. Despite the pressure around me to write in a “modern style,” I did not have to make a conscious decision for or against those trends. All I could do was what worked best for me, to compose in my natural language, to write the things I like, the music that moves me and comes more spontaneously to me. In other words, I prefer a more traditional style with traditional melodies and rhythms, counterpoint, rhythmic energy –there are a lot of syncopations, which I have always liked–, and so forth.

JB: What musical principles did you emphasize?

SZ: My main premise then as in my entire career has been that the music has to transmit emotions. I consider music to be one of the most touching arts. Regardless of the piece, I always try to compose music that has energy, melody, themes, rhythm; music that propels itself forward, communicates something, and affects the audience on an emotional level.

JB: Did you incorporate some influences?

SZ: Certainly, but not in a deliberate way. I did not try to imitate or to follow certain models or composers. Some influences, that in a general sense I have had throughout my career, come from Mexico, from American symphonists –especially my teacher David Diamond–, from Jewish music, and from composers of the first half of the Twentieth Century such as Prokofiev, Hindemith, Shostakovich, Stravinsky, Bartók. That is not to say that all of those influences may necessarily come to light in the cello concerto.

JB: Does the piece have programmatic intentions?

SZ: None whatsoever.

JB: What challenges did you face?

SZ: I knew from the beginning that this was a very serious commission. Therefore, I had to envision a serious work of great scope, virtuosity, and depth of expression. Even to this day, writing for the orchestra is to me a difficult endeavor and back then I had less experience. There are countless technical challenges of orchestration and balance, especially in a concerto for an instrument that does not have a particularly big sound.

JB: Can you give some examples of the sort of feelings that you wanted to emphasize?

SZ: The introduction of the first movement, for instance, is quite heartfelt. I wanted the audience to feel involved at once and to react to it in an emotional manner. I recall an occasion when Prieto came to New York and I had the opportunity to play the introduction for him on the piano. He liked it very much, and that motivated me even more to continue my work. The opening of the second movement is very dramatic. My idea was not to be shy, not to hold back, not to limit myself. There are big

crescendos and powerful tuttis in fortissimo with substantial participations from brass and percussions.

JB: Do you write for the public or just for yourself?

SZ: I definitely write both for myself and for the public. I cannot conceive of the idea of composing without thinking about the audience. The music has the power to bring people together and to express feelings in a more meaningful, profound, and memorable fashion than words. It is capable of achieving an intimate communion between composer, performer, and listener.

JB: How did you undertake the creative process of the concerto?

SZ: I usually visualize a global plan: extension, movements, character. At first it is just a vague, abstract concept. Then, I work a lot at the piano, constantly improvising and trying ideas. When I find something interesting, I play it many times and write down the early cells. I continue improvising and annotating sketches of some chief melodies and sections. Later on, I start to fill things out by adding harmonies, contrapuntal lines, orchestration details, etc. The schemes continue to develop and to take shape but always working at the piano, with my fingers, and with my imagination.

JB: Can you tell us something about the world premiere?

SZ: It was a most traumatic experience for me. I worked intensely under ever increasing pressure to meet the deadline. Near the premiere, I hired a copyist to produce the instrumental parts as I was completing the score. He did not deliver them in spite of my desperate pleas; in fact, there was a point when he would not even answer my calls, much to my dismay. The first two rehearsals were practically wasted. Due to the incomplete parts, the increasingly annoyed conductor rehearsed a bit and then canceled the rest of the session. I worked day and night without sleeping for some 48 hours to have the parts ready for the third and final rehearsal. Fortunately, the concerto was put together at the last moment. On the night of the premiere, an audience unaware of all the backstage drama greeted the concerto with enthusiasm. Yet some reviews criticized its “conservative” style.¹⁰

JB: What about the first performance in México?

SZ: It took place in Mexico City’s Palacio de Bellas Artes with the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional conducted by Enrique Diemecke. After a few changes, the final version was used for this performance as well as for the recording. Unlike the event of New York, everything went quite smooth this time. The public’s response was great. One particular review still disapproved of the traditional style of the concerto, but others were quite positive.

Barrón Corvera, Jorge. “Samuel Zyman’s *Concerto for Cello and Orchestra: An Analytical Approach*.” *Diagonal: An Ibero-American Music Review* 5, no. 2 (2020): 78–106.

¹⁰ See Carlos Prieto, *Las aventuras de un violonchelo: Historias y memorias* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012), 136–139, 170, 270–271, and 521.