

SONATA FOR SOLO HARP by David Avshalomov

I wrote the Sonata for Harp for my friend Maria Casale, whose incredible musicianship I have known since she was a teen-aged member of my father's Portland Youth Philharmonic. She gave the world premiere for the Santa Barbara chapter of the American Harp Society in 2000, with repeat performances at Concerts West and the Los Angeles chapter of the AHS in 2001.

The first movement, Legend, grew out of an old sketch which I had once considered using in a piano sonata. To be used for the harp, it required some revision, as portions employed an eight-tone scale of alternating half-steps and whole-steps (a family signature) that is not truly possible on the harp, which has only seven strings per octave. I did some deft rethreading, and listeners will not miss the eighth string. Fans of "traditional" glittering solo harp music will also listen in vain for the stereotypical sounds of the salon: there are no glissandi, no long thrummed chordal sections. This is a serious work, more contrapuntal than chordal, for a serious harpist and artist.

The opening movement is built on the terse motives of its start. It is an extensive modified developmental sonata form, starting and ending in modal d minor. A simple duple-meter introduction leads to a solemn, almost ritualistic processional based on an ostinato of four turning eighth-notes under slow descending chords. Melodic extensions lead to a third section of sextuplet figures around slow notes played in harmonics, repeated full voice and building to a stentorian climax. A gentle turning leads to a development section based first on the motives of the introduction, then jumping to the third thematic group, then offering a fresh episode with two completely new melodies (never developed or recapped) having a troubadour-like swing, both in a triple rhythm and a new key. This texture gradually incorporates motives from the ostinato section, which take over, build momentum, and turn decisively back to the ostinato section as recapitulation, building up incredible tension to a strong, stern, proud ending.

The second movement is a pensive, solemn, dignified Meditation, a simple series of melodies in alternating oriental modes. An Impressionistic middle episode uses atmospheric glissandi and tremolo (the only instance of this in the piece), followed by a serious return, and a simple poignant ending. Dedicated to the memory of my paternal grandfather Aaron Avshalomoff.

The third movement, Danza, is a quick, dancy, major-key bagatelle on changing polymeters (5/8 5/8 6/8, etc.) over a covert blues harmonic scheme. It is built as a quick series of microvariations on the simple opening tune, almost fading away at the end but with a cheery surprise ending.