

Passages

For Clarinet, Cello and Piano (2004, rev. 2005)

Premiered by the Ronen Chamber Ensemble

David Bellman, clarinet

Ingrid Fischer-Bellman, cello

Richard Ratliff, piano

as part of the Chamber Music Series of the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis on May 18, 2004 at the Indianapolis History Center

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Program Notes:

Heraclitus speaks of the paradox of the river-it is always the same yet one can never step in the same river twice. Likewise our lives are both banal and uneventful-but also profoundly fluid and subject to the sudden whims of fate. *Passages* is a reflection on some of these moments.

An Israeli colleague describes the occasion at which the klezmer tune “Halaka” is played: “It is the custom of orthodox Jews to give their children their first haircut at the age of 3 while reveling on Mt. Meron at the grave of the founder of the Kabbalah. Merry klezmer music evokes the night, the dawn and the morning on this mountain crowded with large families celebrating the official entry into childhood of their offspring.” The movement begins with an evocation of the *shofar* being played at sunrise on the mountain. The tune is presented in an authentic manner, but I have radically reharmonized it. After a substantial development section the tune returns, ending with a rapturous climax.

“Lament” is a response to the passing of two individuals, both decent and beloved men whose sudden deaths left tremendous voids in their wakes. Such moments are bittersweet, with grief mingling with gratefulness for the warm memories they leave behind. The movement begins with a three-note motive that will influence the entire work. At first it is expanded to a severe twelve-tone row, but is quickly assimilated into a stately and comforting progression of chords. This alternation between icy chromaticism and reassuring harmony, between lamentation and solace, continues throughout the movement.

The last movement, “Dancing...on an Eight-Spoked Wheel” refers to the Buddhist symbol representing the *Dharma*, the eight principles of a balanced life which prepares the spirit for transcendence of daily tribulation. In the Hindu tradition, the gods often accomplish their tasks by dancing. Similarly, a common feature of indigenous American music is the primacy of rhythm-for example, the message of the blues is that no matter what challenges we are confronted with, we can lose ourselves in the beat and find the strength to carry on. This last movement is thus a simple, but satisfying response to moments of passage-a groove.