Akshaya Avril Tucker

The Heart Savors its Fragrance

for Solo Violoncello

2019

Duration: approx. 16 min.

Full Score
Commissioned by Robert Howard  
with support by the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music

This version of the piece contains some basic choreographed hand gestures. A sonic-only version is available.

### Performance Notes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LH:</th>
<th>Left Hand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RH:</td>
<td>Right Hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s.p.:</td>
<td>sul ponticello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m.s.p.:</td>
<td>molto sul ponticello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s.t.:</td>
<td>sul tasto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ord.:</td>
<td>common practice bow placement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- @: Dampen string with LH or left fingers (no pitch)
- o: Open string
- #: Double harmonics: touch two nodes on the same string.
- Dotted line with arrow: motion of the left hand/arm, through space, from one position to the next
- Overpressure: Experiment with about 75% scratch and 25% pitch.

| Triangle Noteheads: Play with the bow on these nodes of the strings. |
| Apply a bit of pressure and scrape bow down vertically, from "ord." placement, all the way to the threads of the strings. |

Mentally say the written words, and play the rhythm that you hear. When repeating the phrase, keep altering the way you "play" the words. Align the RH (bottom staff) and LH (top staff) rhythms for a composite unison sound.

| Small noteheads: strings of very legato, fluid notes. Apply less LH pressure; the sound can be much less articulate. This effect imitates Hindustani ornamentation. |
| B 1/4-tone b on C string (IV) as a naturally-occurring harmonic. Approximate tuning: -31 cents. |
Program Notes

In 2009, I began learning a piece of choreography by my Guru Ranjanaa Devi, called "Sabori". It was an Oriya setting of a part of a collection of esoteric poetry called "Charyapada", Songs of Realization, of the 8th-12th Centuries, in Odisha, India. As I later learned, this was a fascinating moment in the religious and cultural history of the region, dominated by Buddhist Tantrism and tribal religions. The characters who appear in Sabarapada, the poem I have spent these 10 years puzzling over, reflect this cultural diversity. Without going into too much detail about the poem (contact me if you'd like to read the 20-page research paper I wrote about it in college...), I will describe its musical incarnation here.

"The Heart Savors its Fragrance" is my musical meditation on the Goddess Nairatmya, the embodiment of the Buddhist philosophical idea of "no self." It describes a lonely, sensuous forest atmosphere, where the Goddess wanders, and the spiritual seeker eventually unites with her. Having grown up in a forest, I wanted to capture some of the spiritual imaginings that can happen in a place that is both so full and so empty. Perhaps you might believe that a tree could grow all the way up to the sky within a couple magical musical phrases.

The name "The Heart Savors its Fragrance" refers to the metaphor used to describe the heart and our capacity to feel. This metaphor is paan, a street food made of betel leaves with various flavors inside, which is still enjoyed in South Asia today. In Medieval poetry, lovers wrapped paan lovingly in anticipation of the arrival of their beloved. To me, this idea that the heart can enjoy (or eat) the fragrant essence within it -- that is to say, love -- points to the endless well of spiritual bliss inside us, a vast, encompassing aroma that far exceeds the scope of our loneliness.

In Odissi dance, we tell stories using the power of gesture and intention. I wanted to bring this choreographic magic to the cello -- my first instrument. For a piece that sits prominently on the open strings (A, D, G, C) -- notes that a beginner spends a bit of time on -- unusual techniques happen frequently enough to keep the performer on their toes. Some of those "techniques" involve gestures of love: embracing the cello as a part of oneself. (Even placing necklaces and earrings upon it, as I would to my own body, gesturally, through dance).

The meaning behind these loving gestures is very intentional for me as a cellist. After experiencing performance injuries a few years ago, it's a challenging emotional and physical journey to come back to a state of comfort while playing.

Many thanks to Robert Howard and the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music for their tireless support and guidance. Thank you to my Guru Ranjanaa Devi for introducing me to the magic of this poetry and dance; and finally, to Robert-Christian Sanchez for delivering to me that most satisfying and fruitful of all cello positions, the cello hug.

Charyapada 28 (Songs of Realization) - Sabarapada
Translation by Akshaya Avril Tucker and Hasna Jasmuddin Moudud.

Up in tall mountain peaks, Sabari lives -
decked in peacock feathers -
a string of red gunja berries, on her neck

O wild, mad Sabara,
Stop your useless, heart-wrenching cries -
for your own
is the Goddess of Innate, blissful Beauty.

The tree grew, and flowered,
the branch brushed the sky.
Sabari's ears hang with the weight of her earrings,
she grasps the sacred thunderbolt, Vajra -
and wanders alone, in the forest.

The bed of three metals is placed.
Sabara spreads the sheets with delight -
the lover, Sabara, and Sabari, the beloved, caress until morning.
The heart, a betel leaf, savors the fragrant camphor wrapped inside.
Embracing the Void in his neck,
Sabara passes the rapturous night.

Consider the Guru's words as your bow,
and with your mind as the arrow,
Pierce through Nirvana in one try.
The Heart Savors its Fragrance
for Solo Violoncello

Vilambit (very slow, meditative)
bow behind bridge, dampen string w/ LH (reaching over the bow)

sim.
behind bridge, dampen string

Again, slow
m.s.p.

* Rock bow up to I+II, then back to II; sustain II as possible.
Necklace (Uneven, continuous tapping)

7 tap bridge ...body towards L. rib ...along rib towards neck ...up neck (L side)

LH ppp

bow on bridge bow freely, slowly

RH ppp

8 ...up, around scroll ... down top of fingerboard, touching random harmonics poco s.p.

m.s.p. s.p. p
Decked in Peacock Feathers (with Extreme Delicacy)

Swish knuckles (or hand) on L rib
(like wiping chalk off a blackboard)

...up, around scroll...down the strings, touching random harmonics

9 tap bridge (tremolo with fingers 1,2,3) ...body towards L rib ...along rib towards neck ...up neck (L side)

LH

ppp

bow on bridge

RH

pp

bow freely

10...up, around scroll...down the strings, touching random harmonics

LH

m.s.p.

RH

p

Decked in Peacock Feathers (with Extreme Delicacy)

Swish knuckles (or hand) on L rib
(like wiping chalk off a blackboard)

11...up, around scroll...down the strings, touching random harmonics

LH

pp

bow on bridge

RH

p

To
Swish fingers along the
Right front body of the instrument

Poco accel.

Draw hand across cello
to fingerboard

** Mentally say these words, and play the rhythm
that you hear. When repeating, keep altering the
way you "play" the words. Align the RH and
LH rhythms.

Poco Rit.

Same, slow pace as before
(Innate, Blissful Goddess)

Menu & accel. . . . . . . A tempo

*Rock between strings, sustaining tremolo as possible
Poco a poco rit.

mf dim. poco a poco
The heart savors its fragrance

26

D

place LH on heart

27

dotted line

place hand on "cello heart"
(to left of fingerboard)
tap, in place, on body of cello

Tremolo tapping on body and underside of fingerboard

Rit., phase out of alignment

28

align RH and LH

29

> return hand to your heart

Let LH relax at your side

s.p. sostenuto

"the branch brushed the sky"
E She wanders in this forest alone

Molto sul tasto!
Bow on these nodes:

pp static; simmer without expression

F Faster!
O wild Sabara, O mad Sabara

mp increasing intensity

f

III II I

fast, messy

cresc.
34

35

36

37

get crazier! (merge into next cell)
tumultuous!

Passes the night in bliss!

bow freely

ecstatic


The heart is a betel leaf...

LH to cello heart

align trem's
slowly move out of phase...

horizontally

tap in place on body of cello

rest hand on "cello heart"
place hand on your own heart

\( p \) \( PP \) feel love

Very slow!
Pierce through Nirvana in one try

LH: in one motion, move up, palm briefly over your eyes, then forehead, around your head (as if purifying), make a small circle (with your forearm) out to the left side and back to the neck of the cello.
(Eyes closed or looking down.)

\( PP \) look within

\( PPP \)