RICHARD BOLLEY

INVOCATIONS
(Travels with Alex 5)

for string quartet
( featuring viola obbligato)

Celebrating Alexandra David-Néel (1868-1969) and remembering Fiona McLean (1952-2011)
Invocations is the fifth piece in the cycle Travels with Alex for viola obbligato and various chamber ensembles. The pieces may be performed singly, in combination or (ideally) in the complete numbered sequence.

Instrumentation:
viola obbligato
2 violins
cello

Accidentals last for the complete bar unless corrected - even in the senza misura sections. Thus, naturals are to be presumed unless otherwise specified.

The ‘senza misura’ sections sometimes involve brief interjections into the cadenzas by the other instruments, and although these are metre they too can be interpreted with some freedom. Empty bars during the ‘senza misura’ sections denote that an instrument is silent for the bar or bars with dotted barlines.

Although the Buddhist traditions do not speak of a deity in anything like the sense of the term used in Western theology, it is quite common in the Vajrayana or ‘diamond-thunderbolt’ traditions of Buddhism prominent in regions such as Tibet for embodiments of enlightenment in particular archetypal forms to be celebrated, emulated and even invoked, either in peaceful or wrathful guises, by those wishing protection for a new enterprise, a successful harvest, a long life, the death of a loved one or a difficult journey. The journey in disguise and in considerable danger of the French Buddhist devotee Alexandra David-Neel - reputed to be the first Western woman to have reached the Forbidden city of Lhasa, in 1924 - was one such difficult journey, and Alexandra could well have invoked by mantra the assistance of the bodhisattva Tara – a traditional patron of travellers – many times in the course of this journey. The quartet is a mantric mosaic - interspersing sections in five different temp (slow, quite slow, moderate, quite fast, fast) with freely measured (senza misura) sections containing cadenza-like solos (marked a piacere). These cadenzas are played, for the most part, con sordino (with the mute) although the dynamic level is by no means always quiet. There is some overlapping of solos as the music intensifies towards the end.
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Viola obbigato

Richard Bolley (2013)

November 2021

Alexandra could well have invoked the assistance of the Bodhisattva Tara many times on her pioneering journey from China to Lhasa.