

Beneath Arches of Sublime Wonder

For Solo Flute and Pre-Recorded Soundtrack

By Philip Armstrong

Directions for performance

The flautist stands centre stage. There are stereo speakers on either side of the stage. The flute is not amplified, and at no point should the soundtrack overwhelm the onstage performance.

There are three possible formats for performance (the Literary and Ritual versions can be combined):

1. Concert version.
2. Literary version: The flautist is joined onstage by a reader. The soundtrack and performance are paused one minute into the piece so that the introductory text (published overleaf) can be read aloud.
3. Ritual version: The music is performed in a theatre rather than a concert hall, with appropriate lighting to emphasise the dramatic nature of the performance. The flautist is joined onstage by a ceremonial figure. The soundtrack and performance are paused one minute into the piece so that the ceremonial figure can assist the performer in re-dressing for the ritual. At the beginning of each 'obstacle', the ceremonial figure introduces a prop (or the equivalent) to characterise the coming section. At the end of the performance the ceremonial figure leads the flautist to the culmination of the ritual.

The music was written for a young woman to perform. The concert version can be performed by male or female performers, but the literary and ritual versions are intended for a female flautist.

Written in 2013

Duration: 20 minutes

The Pre-Recorded Soundtrack is available from the composer

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We look to a time when all, save a very few, shall receive the blessings of a transpiercing contrivance such as this. We prepare for a monumental providence.

And so it is she steps forward beneath these arches of sublime wonder, she who shall be counted among those who, having heard the transcendent call of the sagacious, forego all that is cherished and, treading the path of duty and self-abnegation, renounce their hours so that others might reach out for days of liberty and justice.

But only if there is sufficient courage and resolve, and for demonstrating these commitments there is the music to navigate. With this solo flute she must traverse all of the impediments laid out in these soundscapes. Only then can she come to the altar here and receive profane consecration.

It is waiting for her, and it is impatient, but she must show to us that she is ready, and she must prove to herself the same. She can step away from this walkway and relinquish its burdens at any time; she can simply stop if she chooses. Although it is understood that, for those who have already become aware of the path and seen its promise, there is really no longer any turning back. The Sacred Tomb of Ingestion and Assimilation is the only potential terminus. Falling from the path, even marooned midway along its tracks, stranded between any of the obstacles, there is only limbo, the eternal debilitation, and the paralysis of guilt and shame and self-loathing. There are many others already bound by this appalling no-man's-land, those who lacked sufficient strength to overcome their fears, and she would not be alone if this circumstance befell her too, but company would not lessen the misery of that long slow demise and disintegration.

So we urge her on, and embolden her with our reassurances. May she receive the sanctification within her breast, in her heart, and, for the briefest of moments, illumine the night skies with brilliant light.

Come then, before the music begins, let us speak of the pathway. There is a clear view before us. It is a long straight trajectory; at least it appears in that form, with its nine obstacles.

For the first of these she comes to the Utilitarian Stone. It is a large boulder, taller than she is, with inscriptions indicating this is the axiomatic starting point. It is here that the foundations of moral agency are recognised. They establish it is the collective wellbeing of all people that is sought, yet already the music asks questions. This is her flute, and these are the sounds of inquisitorial scrutiny that she must apply.

She plays her music to this hefty block and wonders: if we assume responsibility for promoting the aggregate interests of all people, how can we be sure what their interests are? She ponders: can we justifiably take actions that benefit the cumulative total but that are detrimental to any particular minority? She must address these quandaries fully and, if able to satisfy herself with ripostes, only then move on.

If she progresses forward then next she comes to a huge heap of sand, again taller than she is, and even bigger than the rock from before. This is the Auspice of Accumulation. It is piled high in the middle of the path obstructing the way, but she does not need to haul herself over it. All that is required is for her to remove a single grain from the base, and then to circumnavigate around the side of the heap, as simple as that. Later, others like her shall pass this way too and each of them shall do the same until one day, at last, the heap shall be exhausted and entirely disappear. In the meantime each of them might ask of themselves: which of these single grains of sand could make the difference between there being a heap and there not being a heap? Ask away, yet none shall know the threshold at which action causes effect, and all must continue on with the knowledge they have contributed only a miniscule part to the whole. All must recognise the necessity for a great many to pass this way, ultimately to receive ennoblement, a great many indeed, each of them counted only as a speck of sand in a vast region of desert, before the objectives are fully met and the world knows peace and balance.

Next - the first real hurdle - is the Halls of Feeding, and many like her have failed at this juncture. There are two small chambers set beside one another. They appear as dome huts, whitewashed and windowless, with a small chimney at the top, each possessing a hearth and cooking pot within, and also a cook in waiting who is well versed in preparing wares for the table. He gleans much satisfaction from slaughtering and butchering any vacuous life-form lacking the mind to differentiate between catching from being caught, cutting from being cut, biting from being bitten, and eating from being eaten. Only those who can handle the impasse represented by the Halls can evade him.

She looks on and knows that: entrance to the first chamber is reserved for those who perceive the diner as the prime perpetrator of a feeding, the consumable unable to exist independent of the consumer. Entrance to the second chamber is for those who perceive the meal as prime driver, the partaker unable to exist without the partaken. She sees the skeletons of previous enquirers squeezed together on benches inside both of these chambers, those afflicted with ebbing spirit and the long wane, that have stumbled and lost faith at this juncture, and who now pound their fists and knives upon the table tops and jab their blades into the splintered wood. It is a pitiable sight, this dreadful diminution. They see her too, and they see she is entirely without

cover, as beautiful as the first day of spring, and they yearn intensely for her flesh and blood. But it is hoped this flautist might find the correct conduit and come through intact.

If she succeeds in this then the next hurdle further along comprises two deep wells set on either side of the path. The bewailing laments emanating from the deep are woeful, no less tragic than those of the Halls behind, yet the flautist, even while continuing to play her music, must crank the wooden handle and scoop up water so as to sip tiny droplets from at least one of these. The first is the Well of Alleged Honesty, which embraces transcendent rapture as a threshold to truth, but that professes doubt about its own dogma. The second is the Well of Alleged Deceit, which embraces pain and suffering as a threshold to truth, but that claims its every declaration to be untrue.

If negotiated correctly, the liquids of either of these alternatives will purge the innards of foul residue, and, given that no celebrant would want to grapple with putrid ordure at the moment of formality, clean the bowels. But a false move here, in contrast, can lead to dreadful consequences, an attack of faint-heartedness and to tumbling headfirst into the depths of one or other of the wells where, in both cases, there are dark creatures, far worse than the cook might ever have been, lurking in the shadows ready to dunk and drown all that trespass in their lair, and to stab into them without remorse, into the belly in particular, and thereafter remove the bodies to hidden recesses for further saturations and fabrications.

At the fifth stop are the Platforms of Regeneration, which are less troublesome to traverse. If the Ship of Theseus repaired steadily over a wide span of time, each of its wooden parts replaced one-by-one, remains the same vessel, then similarly the cells of this flautist's body have regenerated many times too and still she remains the same person. The music asks simply: how will she celebrate this ongoing physical rejuvenation?

On the first step-platform the flautist can play her delight at how she grows in stature and belief with every note. Alternatively, on the second platform, she can play her excitement and anticipation for the tasks ahead, her joyfulness at how the world grows in righteousness with every worthy sacrifice brought to solemnity. In this case both options are jubilant and lead to a renewed sense of self-purpose. She is more than half way along the path.

The next hurdle is the Passageway of Humility. The path divides into two tracks on either side of a dividing wall. Along one track she can do anything with her flute, anything at all, even create something she cannot do. And on the second path she can do absolutely nothing at all, but subsequently there is nothing left she cannot do.

Both tracks demand diffidence and acquiescence and are guarded by cutthroat sword-demons able to discern vanity and self-absorption, and to cut and slash and cleave away any

pertinent narcissism. There are arms and legs and other apportioned mortal parts scattered all about, the remnants from those who have succumbed here, and there are further doleful ululations on the air. The smell at this particular tract is nauseating, far worse than any extruded feculence, yet, for all of this, it is another site of great stimulus and inspiration.

Next is the Inexhaustible Time Vortex. It exists alongside the arches as a parallel channel, but appears very differently. It is a maelstrom of clouds above the pathway, immediately above head-height, like a whirlwind, except there is not even a breeze on the air. All is still; there is no noise and no bluster. And at a moment of absolute silence, she plays a single note into the vortex such that it emerges a few moments previously and continues to sound simultaneously with the original note. Accordingly there are two notes sent into the vortex, and then four, and eight, multiplying ad infinitum, just as the arches do the same, a single flautist initiating an immeasurable number of others walking the same path. It is an exhilarating music, this passage of sound, this vestibule to the dais, mesmerising and entrancing. But it is also anaesthetising.

She must move on, for next there are the Steps of Motivation, which are near the end of the path and lead up to the festal terrace. Here there are two options before the flautist. On one side are the steps to be used by those carried forward not by their own means but instead by the stirring performance of this flautist. On the other side is the second set of steps, for those led by their own means and not the music of this flautist.

Which can she choose? It is a difficult dilemma, this self-referencing paradox, and the consequences of a wrong step do not bear thinking about. Between the steps is a deep pit and there are steel prongs at the very bottom, a bed of nails with sharpened points, and far worse things beyond that. There is nothing ever reclaimed from any kind of grievous enfeeblement suffered here.

But if she succeeds in mounting the steps then at last she comes to the Urn of Duty and Obligation. She steps forward to this the ninth and final obstacle.

There is incense burning and again there are questions flickering in the rising smoke and in the music. It is asked whether the authority positioned behind this sense of obligation, tangible in the air all around, has a legitimate right to command obedience. It is asked if there a legitimate social contract here - freely arrived at - and, if so, whether it satisfactorily safeguards the right of individuals to be treated as an end in themselves, and in a manner to which they consent. If there is no answer then still there is a tangible exit-way out of here, another form of deplorable degeneration, albeit leading to a terrible blistering inferno that eventually consumes the all and nothing of those ill-fated.

But if everything is well, then she passes the Urn and steps up into the inner sanctum of the temple. She reaches for the altar. She sees the preparations, and the vision. It is crystal clear now.

She sees the most far-flung reaches of cosmic space and the uncountable observances, on and on and on, already colossal in extent and yet ceaselessly multiplying as the vast universe swells without restraint.

She sees the vault before her that is the Sacred Tomb, and the teeth. It is smiling at her, exuberant, welcoming her. The moment is come, the last manoeuvre held aloft. The music shall falter, but be revitalised and never stop.

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Philip Armstrong

$\text{♩} = 90$

Flute

4

7

12

15

Concert version: continue without pause
Literary version: pause for reading of text
Ritual version: pause for dress-preparation of flautist

19

Fl.

mp *f* *p*

Be,

30

Fl.

p *mf* *p* *f* *p*

Be - neath ar - ches of su - blime won - der,

33

Fl.

f *p* *f* *mp* *f*

won - der.

36

Fl.

p *mf* *mp* *f* *mp* *f* *mf*

38

Fl.

mf *mp* *mp* *f* *mp*

40

Fl.

tongued without breath

f *p* *mp* *f*

44

Fl.

p *mf* *mp*

46

Fl.

f *mp* *f* *mf* *f* *mf* *mp*

48

Fl.

p *p* *mf* *p* *f* *p*

51

Fl.

harmonic on fingering of diamond

f *p* *f*

53

Fl.

mp *f* *p*

nat.

A 1st obstacle: Utilitarian Stone

59

tongued without breath

Fl.

p *f* *f* *mp* *f* *f* *ff*

64 tongued without breath

Fl. *p* *f* *mp* *f* *f* *ff*

69

Fl. *mp* *p* *mf* *p*

Fl. *7*

Ped. *7*

B 2nd obstacle: Auspice of Accumulation

76

Fl. *mf* *mf* *p < mf* *p < mf* *mf* *mf > p* *pp < mf >*

Fl. *3* *6*

Ped. *3* *3*

82

Fl. *p < mf* *p < mf* *mf* *mf* *p < mf* *mf > p*

Fl. *3* *6*

Ped. *3* *3*

87

Fl. *mf* *p < mf* *mp* *p < mf* *pp < mf >* *p < mf* *p < mf*

Fl. *3* *6*

Ped. *3* *3*

92

Fl. *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf*

Fl.

Ped.

Measures 92-96: Flute part with various dynamics and articulation. Pedal part with triplets and sixteenth notes.

97

tongued without breath

Fl. *mf* *mf* *p* *pp* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *mf* *mf*

Fl.

Ped.

Measures 97-102: Flute part with 'tongued without breath' instruction. Pedal part with triplets.

103

Fl. *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf*

Fl.

Ped.

Measures 103-107: Flute part with triplets and sixteenth notes. Pedal part with triplets.

108

Fl. *f* *p*

Fl.

Ped.

Measures 108-114: Flute part with a dynamic range from forte to piano. Pedal part with a sustained note.

C 3rd obstacle: Halls of Feeding

115

Fl. *mp* *mp* *mp* *mp*

Fl.

Ped.

Measures 115-119: Flute part with various dynamics and articulation. Pedal part with triplets and sixteenth notes.

120 *tr*
Fl. *mp* *p* *p* *f p* *f* *mp* *p*

125
Fl. *f p* *f* *mp* *mp*

129
Fl. *mp* *mp* *p* *mp* *mp* *mp*

131
Fl. *mp* *p* *mp* *mp* *mp* *mp* *mp*

134
Fl. *mp* *mf* *p*

137
Fl. *mp*

139

Fl.

Musical score for Flute 139-141. The score is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff (treble clef) contains the flute melody, starting with a dynamic of *mf* and a triplet of eighth notes. It includes a five-note phrase and a triplet of eighth notes, ending with a *p* dynamic. The second staff (treble clef) contains a complex accompaniment with triplets of eighth notes and sixteenth notes. The third staff (bass clef) contains a simple accompaniment with a few notes. Dynamics include *mf*, *p*, *mp*, and *mp*. There are also hairpins and a fermata over a note in the first staff.

142

Fl.

Musical score for Flute 142-143. The score is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff (treble clef) contains the flute melody, starting with a dynamic of *mf* and a triplet of eighth notes. It includes a five-note phrase and a triplet of eighth notes, ending with a *p* dynamic. The second staff (treble clef) contains a complex accompaniment with triplets of eighth notes and sixteenth notes. The third staff (bass clef) contains a simple accompaniment with a few notes. Dynamics include *mf*, *p*, and *mp*. There are also hairpins and a fermata over a note in the first staff.

144

Fl.

Musical score for Flute 144-146. The score is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff (treble clef) contains the flute melody, starting with a dynamic of *p* and a triplet of eighth notes. It includes a five-note phrase and a triplet of eighth notes, ending with a *mp* dynamic. The second staff (treble clef) contains a complex accompaniment with triplets of eighth notes and sixteenth notes. The third staff (bass clef) contains a simple accompaniment with a few notes. Dynamics include *p*, *mp*, and *mp*. There are also hairpins, a fermata over a note in the first staff, and a trill in the first staff.

147

Fl.

Musical score for Flute 147-149. The score is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff (treble clef) contains the flute melody, starting with a dynamic of *mp* and a triplet of eighth notes. It includes a five-note phrase and a triplet of eighth notes, ending with a *p* dynamic. The second staff (treble clef) contains a complex accompaniment with triplets of eighth notes and sixteenth notes. The third staff (bass clef) contains a simple accompaniment with a few notes. Dynamics include *mp* and *p*. There are also hairpins and a fermata over a note in the first staff.

148

Fl.

mp *mf* *p*

D 4th obstacle: Well of Apparent Honesty and Well of Apparent Deceit

152

Fl.

p *pp* *p*

154

Fl.

tr *mp* *f*

157

Fl.

mp *f* *mp* *f* *p* *pp*

trill (b) trill (b)

3 3 3 3

5

161

Fl.

p *mp* *f* *mp* *f* *mp* *f*

trill trill

3 3 3 3 3 3

5

166

Fl.

p *pp*

3 3 3 3

5 5

169

Fl.

p *pp*

172

Fl.

mp *mp* *mp*

175

Fl.

mp

178

Fl.

p

181

Fl.

mp

184

Fl.

E 5th obstacle: Platforms of Regeneration

187

Fl.

192

Fl.

195

Fl.

198

Fl.

Musical score for measures 198-201. The flute part (Fl.) features accents and slurs over eighth notes. The piano accompaniment consists of triplets in both the right and left hands.

202

Fl.

mp *f* *mp* *mp* *mf* *mp* *f*

Musical score for measures 202-204. The flute part (Fl.) includes slurs and dynamic markings: *mp*, *f*, *mp*, *mp*, *mf*, *mp*, and *f*. The piano accompaniment features triplets in both hands.

205

Fl.

mf *mp* *f* *f*

Musical score for measures 205-207. The flute part (Fl.) includes slurs and dynamic markings: *mf*, *mp*, *f*, and *f*. The piano accompaniment features triplets in both hands.

208

Fl.

Musical score for measures 208-211. The flute part (Fl.) features accents and slurs. The piano accompaniment consists of triplets in both hands.

211

Fl.

mp *f mp* *f mp* *mp* *mp* *mf* *mp* *f*

214

Fl.

mf *mp* *f*

218

Fl.

mp *f mp* *mp* *f* *p*

221

Fl.

mf *f* *mf*

Be - - neath ar - ches.

228

Fl.

mf *mf* *mf* *mf*

230

Fl.

mf *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf*

234

Fl.

f *mp* *f* *mf* *mf* *mf*

238

Fl.

mf *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf* *f* *mp*

243

Fl.

p

250

Fl.

F 6th obstacle: Passageway of Humility

257

Fl. *mp* *f* *p*

trill

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

3

freely improvising with gestures and effects

260

Fl.

261

Fl. *mf* *p* *mp* *f* *mp* *mf* *p* *mp*

5 3 3 3

3 3 3

265

Fl. *f* *p* *mp* *f* *mp* *mf* *p*

trill

5 3 3 3

3 3 3

269

Fl. *mp* *f* *p*

272

Fl. *mp* *f* *mp* *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

275

Fl. *freely*

276

Fl. *mf* *f* *mf* *mf* *mf*

Be neath

281

Fl. *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf* *f* *mp*

arch es.

286

Fl. *p*

292

Fl.

G 7th obstacle: Inexhaustible Time Vortex

299

Fl.

mf *p* *f* *mp* *f* *mp*

303

Fl.

f *mp* *f* *mp*

305

Fl.

p *f* *mp* *f*

307

Fl.

p *mf* *p* *p* *f* *mp* *f* *mp*

311

Fl.

f *mp* *f* *mp*

313

Fl.

p *f* *mp*

315

Fl.

p *mf* *p* *mf*

318

Fl.

p *mf* *p* *p*

321

Fl.

mp *p*

324

Fl.

Musical score for measures 324-326. Flute part features a melodic line with triplets and slurs. Piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern with triplets. Dynamics include *mp*.

327

Fl.

Musical score for measures 327-328. Flute part continues with triplets and slurs. Piano accompaniment remains consistent. Dynamics include *p*.

329

Fl.

Musical score for measures 329-330. Flute part features a melodic line with triplets and slurs. Piano accompaniment continues with eighth-note triplets.

H 8th obstacle: Steps of Motivation
tongued without breath

331

Fl.

Musical score for measures 331-334. Flute part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with slurs and triplets. Dynamics include *p*, *mf*, and *mp*.

335

Fl.

Musical score for measures 335-336. Flute part features a melodic line with triplets and slurs. Dynamics include *f* and *mf*. Piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern with triplets.

338

Fl.

mp *pp* *p* *mf* *f*

341

Fl.

tongued without breath

mf *mp* *pp* *p*

344

Fl.

mf *mp* *pp* *f* *f*

348

Fl.

mf *mp* *pp*

350

Fl.

p *mf* *mp* *pp*

354

Fl.

p *mp*

357

Fl.

mf *mf* *mp* *mf* *mf*

360

Fl.

mp *mf* *mf*

363

Fl.

p

I 9th obstacle: Urn of Duty and Obligation

365

Fl.

f *p* *mf* *mf* *mp* *f*

369

Fl.

p *f* *p* *f* *p* *mp* *pp* *p* *f* *mp*

373

Fl.

mf *mf* *mf* *f* *p*

377

Fl.

p *f* *p* *mp* *pp* *p* *f* *mp*

381

Fl.

mp *mf* *mf* *mp* *f*

385

Fl.

p *f* *p* *mp* *pp* *p* *f* *mp*

389

Fl.

p *mp*

393 (b)

Fl.

mp

396

Fl.

mf

398

Fl.

p *pp*

J The last manoeuvre

401

Fl.

pp < *mp* > *pp* *mf* > *p* *p* < > *p* < > *p* *mp* *pp* < *mp* > *pp* *mf* >

mouth away from blow hole, the air noise and tone roughly equal

Be neath ar - ches of su -

405

Fl.

p *pp* < *mp* > *pp* *pp* < *mp* > *pp* *p* < > *p* < > *p* < >

blime won - der. won - der. Be

410

Fl. 

pp < *mp* > *pp mf* > *p* *p* < > *p* < > *p* *mp* > *pp* < *mp* > *pp mf* >

414

Fl. 

p *pp* < *mp* > *pp* *pp* < *mp* > *pp* *p* < > *p* < > *p* < >

419

Fl. 

pp