Inner Fire

Cello Concerto no. 2

Composer: Avner Dorman
Year: 2026
Duration: 30 minutes
Orchestration: 2.2.2(bcl).2/2.2.0.0/timp.2perc/str
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Program Note

Inner Fire
Concerto for Cello and Orchestra

When Kristina Reiko Cooper and I began discussing this concerto, we found ourselves drawn to the metaphor of fire—not just as a destructive force, but as something deeply human and transformative. Fire provides warmth and comfort, it can rage out of control, and it exists within us as a source of energy and spirit. The Hebrew words neshima (breath) and neshama (soul) share the same linguistic root, and practices like Tummo meditation generate inner heat through focused breathing. This connection between breath, fire, and transformation became the guiding principle for the work's five-movement structure.

A single melodic gesture—Bb, Cb, Eb, D (intervals of +1, +4, -1)—threads through all five movements, unifying the concerto's emotional and spiritual journey. This motif appears in various guises: as prayer, as dance, as fury, and ultimately as disciplined inner energy.

Invocation opens with a sustained orchestral pedal over which the solo cello enters with an intense, prayer-like call—something between the depth of "Out of the depths I cry to you" and the clarion call of a muezzin. The orchestra responds heterophonically, layering individual voices in a texture of spiritual contemplation.

As the movement progresses, the music gradually becomes more fluid and gentle, as if the initial cry has been heard and answered.

Ignition bursts forth with perpetual-motion energy. While largely maintaining a driving forward momentum, the movement includes moments of contrast before returning to its kinetic core. Like the first movement, it concludes with a distant echo—as if the flame, once ignited, continues to flicker even as it recedes.

Wildfire unleashes the most rhythmically complex music of the concerto. Though notated primarily in 6/8 and 9/8, polyrhythms and rhythmic illusions create an unstable, dangerous energy—imagine the elfin lightness of Romantic scherzo colliding with the metric complexity of progressive metal. The music threatens to consume everything in its path.

Hearth offers respite. The first half luxuriates in rich harmonies—open chords, overtone clusters, and spacious textures that evoke warmth and safety. The second half transforms into a minor-mode fugue, with entries gradually building through the orchestra. Here, fire becomes the center of communal gathering, a source of reflection and comfort.

The finale, **Inner Fire**, draws directly on Tummo meditation practice. A repeating rhythmic motif—two sixteenth notes followed by a pizzicato on the cello's open C and G strings—mimics the pattern of breath: in, out, in, out, in, out, in…hold…in. This simple gesture grows and transforms throughout the movement, building energy through additive processes while maintaining fierce momentum. The orchestra gradually joins the soloist's journey, and the music rises to an ecstatic release—not through frenzy, but through disciplined accumulation of inner power.

Inner Fire runs approximately 25-30 minutes and was composed for Kristina Reiko Cooper and the Boston Modern Orchestra Project.

— Avner Dorman

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