

Notes on *A Gift from the Bower* for unaccompanied cello
by Chris Becker

When I first saw the enormous chair Rachel Gardner and Carlos Canul constructed for *A Gift from the Bower*, an outdoor, multi-disciplinary group exhibition conceived by nationally-renowned artist James Surls, I had a vision of a cellist seated in a chair on the chair, performing solo in a bower deep in the woods of Splendora Gardens. I shared this image with Rachel, who didn't think I was nuts, and over the course of several weeks, I composed a piece for unaccompanied cello. I was honored when cellist Patrick Moore agreed to premiere the work; his formidable technique and the deep expression he brings to his playing inspired me to embrace the challenge of composing a solo for his instrument.

Knowing my piece would be performed outdoors, I was inspired to evoke the rhythm of sound events one hears in woods, especially the rise and fall of wind as it moves through branches and leaves. The very opening of the piece and later, what I hear as an extended coda, were created as moments for the cellist as much as for the listener and are performed in a sort of meditative state, calling to mind the age-old question, "If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" The repeating measures of 16th notes in the piece's demanding middle section, where the cellist determines the number of repetitions, pay tribute to two of my heroes, Terry Riley and Philip Glass. While composing the work, Bach's *Six Suites for Violoncello Solo* was another important point of reference, as was double bassist Eberhard Weber's 1973 album, *The Colours of Chloë*.

Once finished, it made sense to name the piece *A Gift from the Bower* since the opportunity to compose the work was a gift, and in exchange, so is the music I have composed.