

Joseph Klein

# Der Leichenschleicher

(The Corpse-skulker)

character study after Elias Canetti

for solo contrabass

(1997)


- for Michael Hartt -

duration: c. 5'



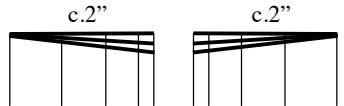
## Performance Notes


∅ *senza misura* → → → gradual change from one mode of play to another


X/4 metered notation: beat units are fixed, measure units fluctuating  smooth, even portamento/glissando

‘ , pause/break in sound (very short/short)  erratic portamento/glissando (*molto vibrato*)

$\uparrow\frac{1}{4}$   $\uparrow\frac{1}{8}$   $\downarrow\frac{1}{4}$   $\downarrow\frac{1}{8}$  quarter-/eighth tone above/below indicated pitch.

 accelerando/ritardando within the duration indicated.

 durational continuum in *senza misura* sections: arranged from shortest to longest (precise durations *ad libitum*).

 fermata continuum: arranged from shortest to longest.

- Accidentals apply only to the notes they immediately precede, with the exception of repeated pitches.
- The recurring descending portamenti (beginning in measure 38) may be executed by detuning the fourth string with the peg on those instruments not equipped with a fifth string or low C extension; in either case, the final occurrence (in measure 62) must be executed in this manner.

## Program Note

*Der Leichenschleicher* (*The Corpse-skulker*) is the first in a series of short works for solo instrument based upon characters from *Der Ohrenzeuge: Fünfzig Charaktere* (*Earwitness: Fifty Characters*), written in 1974 by the Bulgarian-born British-Austrian novelist Elias Canetti (1905-1994). Canetti's distinctive studies incorporate poetic imagery, singular insights, and unabashed wordplay to create fifty ironic paradigms of human behavior. This collection of works, begun in 1997, was inspired by the vividly surreal depictions of Canetti's characters, and includes works for contrabass, violin, bass flute, ocarina, contrabassoon, glass harmonica, alto saxophone, trumpet, percussion, bass saxophone, guitar, and piccolo, among others. In Canetti's depiction of this character, the Corpse-skulker "goes from bar to bar, looking for acquaintances.... The moment he spots one, he walks over solemnly, greets him, stops, remains silent, and then says in a lamenting, rather sing-song

voice: 'Have you heard, N.N. has died'.... [H]e infects them with his funeral lusts and invites them so emphatically that some people come even though they would never have dreamt of it, but fearing his next announcement could be about them."

*Der Leichenschleicher* was composed in June of 1997 for contrabassist Michael Hartt. The work was first performed by Todd Markey on 22 November 1999 at the University of North Texas.

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## Der Leichenschleicher

(The Corpse-skulker)

Now and then, the corpse-skulker appears in a bar. He's been known here for years, but he doesn't come often. If people don't see him for a few months, they wonder about him, slightly worried. He always carries a bag from some airline, Air France or BEA. He seems to travel a great deal, since he often vanishes for long stretches. He is always back again in the same way. He appears and halts earnestly in the doorway. He scours the bar, looking for acquaintances. The moment he spots one, he walks over solemnly, greets him, stops, remains silent, and then says in a lamenting, rather singsong voice: "Have you heard, N.N. has died." The acquaintance is startled, for he did not know, and the corpse-skulker is wearing black, which you only notice after his announcement. "The funeral is tomorrow." He invites you to the funeral, he explains where it is, and gives detailed and precise directions. "Do come," he adds. "You won't regret it."

Then he sits down, orders a drink, toasts your health, says a few words, never tells where he has been, never tells what his plans are, he gets up, walks solemnly to the door, turns around once more, says "Tomorrow at eleven," and vanishes.

Thus he goes from bar to bar, looking for acquaintances, who were also acquaintances of the deceased, he makes sure that there are not too few of them, he infects them with his funeral lusts and invites them so emphatically that some people come even though they would have never dreamt of it, but fearing his next announcement could be about them.

– Elias Canetti, *Der Ohrenzeuge: Fünfzig Charaktere*  
(translated by Joachim Neugroschel)

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The musical score is written for a solo contrabass in 4/4 time. It is divided into five systems of music. The first system (measures 1-8) is marked 'arco' and 'ff', with a tempo of c.72. The second system (measures 9-12) is marked 'pizz.' and 'p sub.', with a tempo of 60. The third system (measures 13-16) is marked 'arco' and 'pp', with a tempo of 60. The fourth system (measures 17-18) is marked 'arco, sul pont. (molto); agitato', with a tempo of c.72. The fifth system (measures 19-24) is marked 'arco' and 'ff', with a tempo of c.72. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (pp, p, mp, mf, ff, sfz), articulation (pizz., arco), and performance instructions (delicato (portamento), agitato). It also features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and quintuplets, and a key signature of one sharp (F#).

22  $\text{♩} = 60$

*pizz.* *poco* *sfz* *molto*

25a arco

*pp* *delicato (portamento)* *pp* *p*

25b  $\text{♩} = 60$

*p* *ppp (echo)* *delicatissimo*

30  $(\text{V} \square \text{ ad lib.})$

*p* *molto* *ff* *quasi delirante*

31  $\text{♩} = c.72$   
*vib. ord.*

*mf* *p* *sul pont. (molto); agitato*

35  $\text{♩} = 60$   
*pizz.*

*p* *mp* *mp* *p*

41

*mp* *mp* *mp*

♩ = c.72

→ → → *sul pont. (molto); agitato*

46 arco *ff* *sfz* *p*

pizz. +

48 *p* *pp delicatissimo*

III 2 I 3

II 1

3

♩ = 60

pizz. *mp* *p*

50

3

5 = o.

*mp*

♩ = c.72

54 arco *ff* *sfz*

pizz. +

57

♩ = 60

60 pizz. (w/ tuning peg) *mp* *n*