

**Violuminescence**  
**By Richard Festinger**

INSTRUMENTATION

2 Flutes, flute 1 doubling on piccolo

1 Oboe

1 Clarinet in Bb

1 Bass Clarinet

1 Bassoon

2 Horns

1 Trumpet

1 Trombone

2 Percussionists:

Percussion 1: Vibraphone

Percussion 2: Marimba

3 Suspended Cymbals

Cowbell

Triangle

Temple Blocks

Bongos

Snare Drum

4 Tomtoms

1 Harp

Strings

*Violuminescence* (1985) is a setting for solo violin and chamber orchestra. Like any piece of orchestral music which is built around a solo instrument, it inevitably explores and exploits the dramatic possibilities inherent in the relationship between the soloist and the larger ensemble. The drama is evident from the very outset, as the violin's quiet opening soliloquy (which incidentally contains within it the seeds from which the entire piece will grow) is answered by the orchestral strings with a brief crescendo to a long sustained fortissimo chord.

*Violuminescence* consists of four short movements played without pause.

The tempi of the four movements are all related: the first is marked *molto adagio*; the second *doppio movimento*, or twice as fast; the third falls back to the tempo of the first, and the fourth, marked *allegro*, takes again the tempo of the second. The solo violin part explores many moods, at times lyrical, whimsical, fanciful, convoluted, mysterious, refined. While the orchestra's role is to create a world in which the solo violin is the chief inhabitant, various instruments are featured at times either as soloists or sections. Splashes of harp and solo woodwind colors dot the landscape of the first movement. The second movement features

choirs of woodwinds, brass and strings, and also unpitched percussion, and a bass clarinet solo makes a transition to the third movement. The trumpet, clarinet and marimba find solo opportunities in the last movement, and the unpitched percussion returns with full force at the climax.

The title *Violuminescence* refers to what I think of as the luminous quality of the violin when it plays expressively in its high register. It is also a play on the term *bioluminescence*, which refers to the light emitted by many species of living creatures, including lightning bugs, glow worms, fox fire, and many species of fish, jellyfish and crustaceans. The title is not, however, intended to evoke visual, literary or other kinds of extramusical associations.

Shortly after it was completed, *Violuminescence* was chosen by the Berkeley Symphony Orchestra to receive its first performance as part of the B.S.O.'s "Under Construction" project. The reading took place November 13, 1995 at Saint John's Presbyterian Church in Berkeley, conducted by J. Karla Lemon. The solo part was played by Joseph Edelberg, concert master of the Santa Rosa Symphony/

*Violuminescence* was subsequently named 1995 winner of the Boston Chamber Ensemble's annual composition competition, and received its performance by that group in Edward Pickman Hall at the Longy School of Music in Cambridge, September 28, 1996, conducted by Steven M. Clark. The soloist was Bayla Keyes, formerly of the Muir String Quartet, and co-Chair of the String Department at Boston University School of the Arts.

Richard Dyer, music critic for the Boston Globe, wrote, "The piece is full of interesting effects - unusual groupings of violin with solo instruments or groups of instruments... But the piece is more than a string of effects; it is music, colorful, closely argued, dramatic and interesting."

*Violuminescence* was also chosen for the Riverside Symphony's Third Annual International Composers Competition, which took place in Miller Theater at Columbia University, March 29, 1997, conducted by George Rothman. The soloist was Rolf Schulte, well known for his recordings of contemporary repertoire.