

SAM NICHOLS

*Monkey Fist*

for solo cello  
(2006-08)

**program note**

A monkey's fist is a knot that is both functional and decorative. It's made by wrapping a piece of rope over and around itself in a certain pattern; it's often formed around a heavy object such as a lead weight or glass ball. This makes it possible to heave a line to another person, across water or some other obstacle.

Growing up near the water in Maine, I sometimes watched as people tied monkey's fists and other knots (such as sheepshanks and bowlines), only a few of which I was ever able to learn. After watching someone tie a knot a few times and seeing its twists and turns, I could duplicate it. But then I would forget it. So, learning a new knot meant I would tie and retie it obsessively—worrying at it, knowing that sometime soon I might not be able to remember how to do it again.

Learning to tie a monkey's fist was the inspiration for the musical structure of this piece. It's a tangle of different strands of music, perhaps resembling not only this particular knot, but also the way our memories are layered on top of other memories. Its anxious, obsessive quality reminds me of the feeling you get when you know that you might forget something...

dedicated to David Russell

# Monkey Fist

for solo cello

Sam Nichols

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Fast, unsettled ♩ = ca. 120

(sounding:)

The musical score is written for a solo cello and consists of four systems of music. The first system begins with a 2/4 time signature, which changes to 4/4. It features a variety of dynamics including *ff pesante*, *p*, *f*, *p*, and *f*. Articulations include accents, slurs, and breath marks. Fingerings are indicated with numbers 1-5 and 3<sup>1</sup>. The second system starts at measure 6 with a *sim.* marking and includes dynamics *p*, *f*, *mp*, and *p*. The third system starts at measure 10 with dynamics *pp*, *pp*, *f*, and *f*. The fourth system starts at measure 14 with dynamics *ff*, *fp*, *fp*, *f*, *mf*, *ff*, and *p*. The piece concludes with a *delicate* marking and a final *p* dynamic. The score includes numerous slurs, accents, and breath marks throughout.



### Slower, trying to settle down

♩ = ca. 96

*floppy; an uneven see-sawing*

36 *ffff* 3 *ff* *pesante* *p* *f* *mf* 3 *p* *mf* *p*

41 *mf* 3 *p* *mf* 3 *p* *f* 6 6 *ff* *p* < *mp*

*aggressive* *espr.*

46 *sim.* *ff* 3 3 3 *p* *mp*

49 *spastic* *ff* 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

### Slower again

♩ = ca. 88

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

56 *f* *ff* *mp*

*holding back*

### Pesante ♩ = ca. 76

60 *ferocious* *p* *fff* *f* *p* *fff* *f* *fff* *f*

### Shifting ♩ = ca. 96

68 *pp* *pp* *p* *ord.* *col legno battuto*

72 *mp* *pp* *p* *mp* *pizz.* *arco*

76 *f* *mf* *f* *pizz.* *arco*

### A bit faster ♩ = ca. 108 *hushed, nervous, intense*

81 *ff* *pp* *mp* *pp*

86 *mp* *pp*

89

92 *f*

### Intense ♩ = ca. 96

95 *ff* *ff* *fff*

99

103 **Calm** ♩ = ca. 60

*pp* *p* *ppp*

*lontano; delicate*

106

*p* *ppp*

109 *espr.*

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

*poco*

113

*ppp* *pp* *ppp* *pp* *ppp*

118 *drifting away*

*pp* *ppp* *pppp*

123 **Fast** ♩ = ca. 120

*ff pesante* *p* *ff*

129

III. I. II.

*fff* *p*

133

*f* *p* *f* *p* *f*

138

*p* *ff* *p > pp* *f*

143

*ff* *p* *ff > mf 6*

147

*p* *ff* *mf* *p*

150

*f* *ff* *ff*

152 *ritenuto*

3 *fff*

155 *a tempo*

*p*

159

*p* *f* *ff* *p* *sul pont.* *ord.*

163

*fff* *agitated* *molto sul pont.* *ff* *fff*

Slower, settled ♩ = ca. 96

166

ord. (non pont.)  
flaut.

ord. (non flaut.)

flaut.

*mf* serene, unruffled

*p* (sempre poco *sfz*)  
indifferently ticking away

*mf*

170

ord.

flaut.

*p*

*mf*

174

ord.

flaut.

ord.

*p*

*mf*  $\rightrightarrows$  *mp*

*p*  $\rightrightarrows$  *pp*

177

flaut.

ord.

*mp*  $\rightrightarrows$  *p*

*pp*  $\rightrightarrows$  *pppp*