Lisa Bielawa

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Note

Premiere:	May 22, 2009 at New England Conservatory's Jordan Hall. Commissioned by the Boston Modern Orchestra Project under the auspices of Music Alive, a program jointly administered by Meet The Composer and the League of American Orchestras.
Duration:	22'
Instrumentation:	3333 4331 timpani 3 percussion, piano, harp, strings

In medias res, the title of Lisa Bielawa's new concerto for orchestra, resonates with the composer's practice as an artist and as a collaborator. The Latin phrase, taken from literary terminology, indicates a narrative that begins in the midst of the action, typically used to describe the practice in epic poetry of dropping us into a fully realized world: *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are classic cases; in the former we learn who Achilles is only after we're introduced. Here is what Lisa tells us:

> Over the course of my three-year residency with BMOP I wrote a series of little solo pieces I called "Synopses" for individual members of the orchestra. These fifteen pieces were opportunities for me to forge musical friendships with many of these wonderful players, while developing material for the larger pieces I wrote as part of my residency. "In medias res" (literally, "in the middle of everything") is a literary/narrative device, applicable to epic poetry and modern action cinema, in which the narrator begins the story at the height of excitement, then proceeds to fill the reader/viewer in through flashbacks. My flashbacks are to these little solo pieces - each one a little adventure of its own. The piece is in two movements—entitled "and" and "or"—and it is, in essence, my thank you and farewell gift to Gil Rose, the players of BMOP, and the many wonderful individuals of the Boston music community who welcomed and integrated me into their lives over three years.

Although Bielawa began thinking about the piece that would become *In medias res* as early as 2006, it began to take concrete form in 2008, at first following the premiere of the Double Concerto and then to the exclusion of virtually every other thought. Although armed with potential material in the Synopses, it was as yet unclear how these various things could, or even should, fit together into the large-scale work, Bielawa's largest orchestral piece to date, that she had conceived. Here is what I wrote about Lisa the very first time I had the opportunity to do so, in 2006: "Bielawa's music is notably colorful and evocative, the instrumental gestures seeming to take on an almost tactile quality. As a performer herself, she is constantly aware of needing not only to write idiomatically for each instrument but to make each part satisfying, even fun, to play. This results in a chamber-music intricacy even in large ensemble works, and an orchestral

imagination not far distant from the consummate colorist Jacob Druckman." This is still remarkably to the point for *In medias res*. If anything, Bielawa exhibits an even greater sense of color, balance, confidence, and sense of play—the latter arising so tellingly from her personal relationships with BMOP's performers.

The cohesion the piece exhibits through its changes of mood and material are the hard work of a compositional process that made the most of knowing the personalities of BMOP's players, the conductor, and their collective musical "soul." Listen to the flow of ideas from one instrumental section to another, from the fanfare-like figure that blooms out of the first measures of "and" and echo teasingly at the start of the "or" movement, to the flying scales and upward-zooming arpeggios that threaten to lift the piece right off the stage. More than any other metaphor that might be evoked here, *In medias res* is a party, an artistic, well-crafted, wise, and serious party that the listener is welcomed to with open arms.

– Robert Kirzinger