

Lisa Bielawa

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Note

Premiere: February 27, 2004, Pianist Andrew Armstrong and American Composers Orchestra, conducted by Steven Sloane; Zankel Hall, New York

Duration: 40' **

Orch: Piano Solo, 2(Pic)1(A)00; 2320; 2Perc, Accordion; Harp; Str.

(A version without accordion is also available: 2(Pic)2(A)2(Eng.Hn.)2; 2320; 2Perc, Harp; Str.)

I Prologue–Roam

II Wait

III Beckon

IV Start

“I roam above the sea,
I wait for the right weather,
I beckon to the sails of ships.
Under the cope of storms, with waves disputing,
On the free crossway of the sea
When shall I start on my free course?”

Aleksandr Pushkin, Eugene Onegin
tr. Vladimir Nabokov

This work originated while I was reading Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*, which has passages of great intimacy and vulnerability, sections where the storyteller addresses the reader directly and hints at sorrows of his own, before going back to the story at hand. The above passage, which struck a powerful chord in me, prompted me to imagine four separate pieces, for four different instrumentations, each bearing the title of one of the active verbs – Roam, Wait, Beckon, and Start. I felt I had found an emotional world that could guide me through an extended musical journey, and this is the journey I wanted to share with the listener in *The Right Weather*.

In the Red Square, near the Pushkin Museum in St. Petersburg, a microtonal carillon pierces the cold air every hour. These bells are refracted in the Prologue. The sound world of *Roam* is restless. I was aware of a roiling impatience underlying a deceptively calm, passive scene: the view from a remote cliff, overlooking an unpropitious sea.

The same tenacious musical material appears in *Wait*, only now in a dialogue between the soloist and an orchestral drone. When Andrew Armstrong first encountered *Wait*, he wrote to me, “the drone lets the piano music have its impetuous, child-like way. It lets the piano protest, wonder, love, regret - all those messy things human beings do in between our two eternal silences.”

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After visiting the still-nascent Zankel Hall, I visualized *Beckon* thus: small groups of players call out the same material to each other, but with completely different understandings. Imagine that you and I both read a story. You think it is a love story, I think it is an adventure story. Now we tell the story to each other, only sort of listening to each other. “Wow, it almost seems like the same story as mine!” we say to each other, full of enthusiasm and without any sadness or confusion, because in each of us, the story is complete.

And it is this completeness that ushers in *Start*, a celebration of volition and readiness. It revels in flourishing details and grandeur, qualities I hear in equal measure in Zankel. *Start* cherishes that kind of pianism that hears a world of nuance in the most urgent, sustained exuberance.

Perhaps we sentimentalize our exile the most when we are finally leaving it behind, and so *Start* is not heedless of nostalgia. But always, the world ahead holds improbable, unfamiliar promise. It shimmers. It radiates initiative and readiness. Joy.

– Lisa Bielawa

**The four pieces comprising *The Right Weather* may also be performed independently.