

unfinish'd, sent

Lisa Bielawa

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Note

Premiere: May, 2000, Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, Derek Bermel, conductor
Duration: 10'
Orch: 1(Pic)111; 1110; Perc; Harp; Piano(Cel); Str (11111)

“...unfinish'd, sent before my time into this breathing world...”
–Shakespeare, Richard III

Commissioned by the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, this piece was subsequently performed at the Pacific Music Festival in Sapporo, Japan, under the baton of Aaron Jay Kernis, and on the MATA Festival in New York by the Nouvel Ensemble Moderne, conducted by Lorraine Vaillancourt. All performances featured the composer as vocal soloist, and the piece was written expressly as an opportunity to collaborate directly with ensembles in this way, as both performer and composer.

The opening soliloquy of Shakespeare's Richard III presents a man who finds that the cruelty of wartime suits him, because of the cruelty of his own birth, which resulted in deformity. For the text of this piece I took a single phrase from this painfully vivid, 40-line account of his unfitness for delight or pleasure: “...unfinish'd, sent before my time into this breathing world...” Here the connection is made between his extreme vulnerability as a child and its cruel consequences in his spirit. I was moved by the universal applicability of this image – an ugly and cruel self, resulting from deep insecurities. This monologue opens with the famous line, “Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer...” Although I didn't use these words in the piece, they triggered memories of the particular and complex significance of Vivaldi's Winter in my own childhood. Traces of the Vivaldi, heard through difficult memories, inhabit the piece.

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