

'Neumark' Dances:  
Chorale Prelude on *Wer nur den lieben Gott*

Lisa Bielawa

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Note

Premiere: Commissioned by the American Guild of Organists for the 2014 Biennial National Convention in Boston, MA.

Duration: 5'  
Instrumentation: Organ Solo

When I was a child, I sang in the children's choir at an Episcopal church under the direction of my mother, who is an organist and a lifetime champion of contemporary organ music. I often heard her playing playful, rhythmic fantasies (sometimes composed by my father) created from the raw stuff of the hymn tunes we sang every week from the Hymnal 1940. My intellectual and emotional development as a musician was molded, year after year, by that book and by those experiences. I always knew which melodies haunted me the most, but as I grew up I gained cognitive awareness of the melodic logic of these hymn tunes, and I came to understand the architecture of my own emotional responses to them. 'Neumark' – which I remember as "If thou but suffer God to guide thee" – has the charisma of an oscillation between natural and harmonic minor, along with melodic cells that encourage us to hear contours echoed upside-down. These properties, combined with the strange words that I didn't quite understand (who was suffering? who was guiding?) made me feel a combination of yearning and excitement. In this chorale prelude I wanted to accentuate, deepen and explore these properties, and these feelings. I also wanted to find as many canons within the melody as I could, at different speeds, some of the upside-down.

– Lisa Bielawa

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