

Lisa Bielawa

WWW.LISABIELAWA.NET

Note

Premiere: April 5, 2013, l'Arsenal de Metz. Commissioned by Radio France for Ensemble Variances

Duration: 15'

Instrumentation: Soprano, alto/tenor saxophone, Bb/bass clarinet, violin, cello, piano

When I was invited by Ensemble Variances to write a piece on the theme of “The Cry” as “an expression of a basic language shared by all human beings as well as a majority of animals,” a specific memory from my early childhood came up: singing the Book of Common Prayer translation of the Te Deum in my mother’s Episcopal church choir: *To thee Cherubim and Seraphim continually do cry.* I remember wondering about these terrifyingly large, animal-like angels, and how they managed this continual crying for joy. Didn’t they ever get tired? Or need to eat something? The idea of multitudes of beings crying for joy reminded me then of the story of the 10,000 Greek soldiers in Xenophon’s *Anabasis* who trudged through enemy territory for weeks, forces decimated and leaders slain, trying to get home. When the front line of soldiers saw the Sea, they also cried out for joy. While the angels cry out “Sanctus! Sanctus!” (*Holy! Holy!*), the soldiers cry out “Thalatta! Thalatta!” (*The sea! The sea!*), because once they see the water they know the way home, and they know they will get there. While at the Radcliffe Institute in Cambridge, MA, I met a Classics scholar who wrote an entire book on this cry of the 10,000 Greeks, and its resonance throughout literature ever since. Tim Rood’s studies led me to Heinrich Heine’s *The North Sea*, in which he meditates on this epic moment.

As vocal soloist in my own work, I wanted to explore some of the performance implications of these various texts that had entered my process. In designing material for the voice, I thought about singing in church, the ecstatic singing of angels, the roar of soldiers, the mannerisms of Greek storytelling in the great oral tradition, the traditions of Gregorian and Anglican chant. The vocal part coaxes cries of various sorts out of the instruments. The texture of the ensemble writing bears witness to my preoccupation, still as lively as when I was six years old, with the sloppy joyfulness of a multitude crying ceaselessly all together – whether angels or soldiers.

I let all of these images, texts, traditions and energies enter the piece and mingle together, without strict dramatic intent. It is more of a dreamscape than a story, more cry than word.

– Lisa Bielawa

Publishing & Management: Daniel Brodney | 917.676.1858 | brodney@prodigy.net

Press Contact: Christina Jensen PR LLC | 646.536.7864 | christina@christinajensenpr.com