

# Lisa Bielawa

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## Note

Premiere: February 13, 2012, Le Poisson Rouge, NYC. Commissioned by Premiere Commission, Inc for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary gala, For pianist Bruce Levingston and the string quartet Brooklyn Rider.

Duration: 12'  
Instrumentation: piano quintet

In 2011, I asked the renowned composer Lisa Bielawa to write a short quintet for piano and strings, a *pièce d'occasion*, in celebration of the 10th Anniversary of Premiere Commission, a foundation I started in 2001 to support new music. In 2008, I had commissioned, premiered and recorded her beautiful *Portrait-Elegy* written in memory of our mutual friend and colleague Alexandra Montano. We had also both worked closely with the gifted members of the Brooklyn Rider string quartet, the group that would join me in performing the world premiere of Bielawa's new piece, appropriately titled *Rondolette*.

The form of this joyous and playful work is certainly a kind of free Mozartean rondo, graceful and elegant, but also written with a mixture of extremely taut counterpoint and polyphony and rendered with a Brahmsian palette of colors. Bielawa deftly uses the strings to weave a sparkling tapestry of sound that sets off the touching themes given to the piano. However, she is also willing to transfer the spotlight quickly from one instrument to another with such delicacy and finesse that the listener may not even realize what has happened until the music has moved on to another destination. It is this kind of compositional assurance and virtuosity that allows Bielawa the freedom to open up the central section to the players in an almost improvisatory way, reveling in the inherent richness of each instrument's unique timbres and sounds. Following this haunting section, and utilizing the rhythmic pulse that is the heartbeat of the work, Bielawa ushers the *Rondolette's* cheerful opening motifs back in, this time with events unfolding at an even quicker pace and a greater sense of urgency. The various themes are combined and exchanged until they reach a climactic coda. Here, the composer lets loose all of the emotions and passions heretofore implied, but until now held back, and the strings and piano soar together in a brilliant ensemble of exultation and passion. Then, with a few playful pirouettes amongst the instruments and some quiet echoes of the Mozartean ornaments and turns that have graced and bejeweled her little rondo throughout, Bielawa crisply snaps the work closed with a classical cadence and a wry, beguiling smile.

– Bruce Levingston

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