

# THE LAY OF THE LOVE AND DEATH

# Lisa Bielawa

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## Note

Premiere: March 22, 2006, Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center, NYC  
Duration: 25'  
Instrumentation: Baritone songs with piano, alternating with solo violin meditations

In World War I, thousands of copies of a single little book survived in the coat pockets of dead soldiers. It was Rilke's epic poem, *The Lay of the Love and Death of Cornet Christopher Rilke*, a work now little known and often dismissed as juvenilia. The eponymous Cornet is a 19-year-old apocryphal ancestral cousin of Rainer Maria's who fought and died in the 17th century war with the Hussars. The poet Rilke was young and full of romantic, creative power when he discovered evidence, in family documents, of the forgotten Christopher. The 23-year-old poet encountered a phantom self in the Cornet – another Rilke whose life was full of wide-eyed courage, action and discovery, but at a terrible cost. The book was written feverishly, in one night. Perhaps the poet Rilke, suddenly aware of his own mortality, was also already aware that, although many of us continue living into more reflective, circumspect years, in a sense all of us die young, because the innocence of our young selves cannot survive the various awarenesses that are the inevitable result of a prolonged tender encounter with a troubled world. A phantom self of my own emerged while I was working on this piece. While exploring a sound world that could engage Colin and Jesse's gifts as well as Rilke's poem, I came face to face with a piano piece I wrote when I was 19. It wanted to be in this piece too, and so it is – it forms the propulsive motive that runs throughout *Storm in the House*.

– Lisa Bielawa

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