

Lisa Bielawa

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Note

Premiere: May 10, 2003, Carla Kihlstedt, voice & violin; Polestar Gallery, Seattle
Duration: 25'
Instrumentation: Solo violin and voice

I was in Prague for the first time for just one day in October, and I walked all day, reeling, overwhelmed by its beauty and richness. In a small bookshop I stumbled across an edition of Franz Kafka's *Meditation* (1912) in a beautiful translation by Siegfried Morkowitz. *This Time* is itself a meditation on a very short excerpt from this volume: "And this time I only recognized these old games after being with them for such a long time. I rubbed my fingertips against each other to erase the shame."

I marveled that this writing was private, quietly observant, and so unlike the allegorical, dystopic Kafka I knew. This introspective side of Kafka seemed to beg for a solo performer who could create a whole world, alone. I wanted to write a series of pieces expressly for Carla Kihlstedt, who was looking to build a repertoire for herself as a solo violinist/vocalist.

Initially, I wrote *This Time* as a stand-alone piece, for the 2001 MATA Festival in New York. Then I discovered the *Parables* on the bookshelf at Aaron Copland's home, while in residence as a Copland Fellow. Again, I recognized Kafka the miniaturist. The thrill of this discovery and a growing intimacy with Carla Kihlstedt's inimitable technique urged me to write *A Handful of World* and *Couriers*. The remaining four pieces, all settings from *Meditation*, were written over the course of a year. They feel to me like journal entries, reflecting moments in both my own life and Carla's, as we have worked together over time. – Lisa Bielawa

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Text

This Time

And this time I only recognized these old games after being with them for such a long time. I rubbed my fingertips against each other to erase the shame.

Couriers

They were offered the choice between becoming kings or the couriers of kings. The way children would, they all wanted to be couriers. Therefore there are only couriers who hurry about the world, shouting to each other - since there are no kings - messages that have become meaningless. They would like to put an end to this miserable life of theirs but they dare not because of their oaths of service.

A Handful of World

Abraham falls victim to the following illusion: he cannot stand the uniformity of this world. Now the world is known, however, to be uncommonly various, which can be verified at any time by taking a handful of world and looking at it closely. Thus this complaint at the uniformity of the world is really a complaint at not having been mixed profoundly enough with the diversity of the world.

Ghosts

You've obviously never talked to ghosts. You can never get a straight answer from them. It's an endless discussion. These ghosts seem to doubt their existence more than we do, and no wonder, considering how frail they are.

Lost

...I stood up, of course, and sighed. 'No, why are you sighing like that? What's happened? Is it some catastrophe that can never be undone? Will we never be able to recover from it? Is everything really lost?' Nothing was lost."

We Ran

We ran closer together, some held hands, you couldn't hold your head high enough because we were going downhill. One shouted an Indian war cry, our legs galloped as never before, when we jumped the wind picked us up by the hips. Nothing could have stopped us; we were running so fast that even when overtaking someone, we could fold our arms and calmly look around.

Finally

Finally, rain even begins to fall from the now overcast sky.

Sources:

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Franz Kafka, Parables, tr. Willa & Edwin Muir ©1947 Schocken Books