

Lisa Bielawa

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Note

Premiere: January 21, 2002, Pianist Evelyne Luest with members of Contrasts Quartet; Merkin Concert Hall, New York City
 Duration: 8'
 Instrumentation: Piano Solo, Drone (The drone may be played by any number of instruments and/or voices, preferably backstage)

"I roam above the sea,
 I wait for the right weather,
 I beckon to the sails of ships.
 Under the cope of storms, with waves disputing,
 On the free crossway of the sea
 When shall I start on my free course?"

Aleksandr Pushkin, Eugene Onegin
 tr. Vladimir Nabokov

Wait is the second of four related works based on six lines from Nabokov's translation of Pushkin's Eugene Onegin, which has passages of great intimacy and vulnerability, sections where the storyteller addresses the reader directly and hints at sorrows of his own, before going back to the story at hand. This passage, which struck a powerful chord in me, gave rise to four separate pieces, each bearing the title of one of the active verbs – Roam, Wait, Beckon, and Start. Together these four pieces form the half-concert-length work The Right Weather.

There is such beauty and even strength in the part of us that stubbornly will not move on. When I read this Pushkin excerpt, which I see as a meditation on the narrator's own internal exile, I felt I had found a whole emotional world that could guide me through an extended musical journey. The same tenacious musical material from the orchestral Roam appears in Wait, only now in a dialogue between the soloist and a drone. When Andrew Armstrong first encountered Wait, he wrote to me, "the drone lets the piano music have its impetuous, child-like way. It lets the piano protest, wonder, love, regret - all those messy things human beings do in between our two eternal silences."

Wait has been performed with a variety of drones. In a recital performance in St. Petersburg, Russia, Andrew Armstrong was accompanied by the droning voices of several of the Philharmonic Hall administrative staff, a local underground jazz vocalist who spoke only Russian, and myself, singing just outside the hall. At Zankel Hall, American Composers Orchestra droned from various positions in the lobby area.

– Lisa Bielawa

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