

THE TROJAN WOMEN

Lisa Bielawa

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Note

Premiere: April 19, 2001, Miami String Quartet, at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center
Duration: 12'
Instrumentation: String Quartet

“Here is where Dawn found the lover of her bed,
Made her children,
Soared into the sky
In a chariot of four blazing stars.

But now we are nothing.
Troy was golden once.
And now is only dust.”

Euripides, The Trojan Women

In 1999 I composed a continuous score for Euripides' tragedy The Trojan Women for a production directed by JoAnn Akalaitis. In 2000 a string quartet based on some of the musical material from that score, which was premiered in 2000 by the Miami String Quartet at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. The string orchestra version was created expressly for the String Orchestra of New York City (SONYC).

The special musical challenge of this project was to identify and convey, in three movements, three variegated forms of grief, each one a consequence of one woman's particular sufferings: “Hecuba,” “Cassandra” and “Andromache.” These women lost husbands and sons in the notorious brutality of the Trojan War. Each time I revisited the piece as it evolved from music for the theatre, to string quartet, and finally to string orchestra, I was informed by a slightly different understanding of the nature of public and private grieving. Euripides' eulogy to the fallen Troy takes its place alongside the picture of Jerusalem in the Lamentations of Jeremiah, W.G. Sebald's searching inquiries into the rubble of Dresden, or the jarring pictures we see daily in the media from troubled cities around the world.

– Lisa Bielawa

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