

# Lisa Bielawa

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## Note

Premiere: May 21, 2000, Western Wind 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Concert, Church of St. Paul & St. Andrew, New York  
Duration: 19'  
Instrumentation: Six voices and digital audio

When the Western Winds approached me to write a large work to celebrate their 30th year and the millennial season, we discovered a mutual interest in exploring the relationship between the voice and digital technology. I decided to combine the Western Wind's live voices in performance with a CD part comprised entirely of their own voices, digitally processed. The texts of *Machina Mundi* (the World-Machine), taken from historically and philosophically disparate sources, all consider the problem of the origin of the universe. The first movement focuses almost entirely on a fragment of Lucretius' *On the Nature of the Universe*, written in the first century AD, and the second movement weaves together writings on the same topic by a broad range of present-day theoretical physicists and metaphysicists and philosophers from roughly a thousand years ago. The raw material for the CD part is a variety of settings of the Lesser Doxology – “Sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper, et in saecula saeculorum, Amen (As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen)” – including excerpts of Leonin, Bach, Gregorian chant, Mozart, Dufay, Lassus, Josquin, Monteverdi, and Schütz, among others. The digital processing was executed using the software Hyperprism on a Macintosh computer.

Lucretius' epicurean philosophy in the first movement prescribes contemplation of the wonders of the universe as an antidote to the fear of death. In reading this work, I found that it was not the elegance of this solution but the palpable undercurrent of profound frustration, even anger, at the universal predicament of mortality, which moved me. If Lucretius provides the message for the piece, the second movement provides the enactment of that message. Any one of the many texts is analytically rigorous, but I used these texts less for their individual sense than to combine them in a multi-layered texture, creating thereby a sense of intellectual delirium.

– Lisa Bielawa

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