

## Letter to Anna

# Lisa Bielawa

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### Note

Premiere: October 30, 1998, Commissioned by San Francisco Girls Chorus and premiered as part of its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration.  
Duration: 6'  
Instrumentation: Treble Voices

When the San Francisco Girls Chorus approached me to write a ‘partner piece’ to my father’s *Dreams*, composed for the Chorus when I was a member, I thought immediately of Sigmund Freud, whose writings on dreams reshaped our understanding of the unconscious mind. As my research progressed, I became aware of a side of Freud which usually escapes notice, that of the watchful and loving father. His daughter Anna first appears in his scholarly writings in his famous *Interpretation of Dreams*. He relates a story about Anna, then 19 months old, waking from a dream about eating “wild stwawbewwies,” the night after her nursemaid had forbidden her to eat them because of an allergic reaction. I became fascinated with the story of this father-daughter paradigm and its similarities to my own family: Anna grew up in a house full of psychoanalytical ideas, began transcribing lectures for her father, and eventually became a leading child psychoanalyst herself. I grew up with a composer father, who wrote music in the living room at the piano while our family’s daily life unfolded around him. For this piece I ended up choosing an excerpt from a letter which Sigmund wrote to Anna when she was 12 years old (the age I was when I joined the Girls Chorus), when he was away from the family’s summer residence on business. This letter also mentions the pleasure of gathering strawberries, among its many wonderfully tender and poetic moments. I found it particularly remarkable that Sigmund, one of this century’s most celebrated atheists, invokes the Almighty. At this point in the piece I incorporated a couple of phrases addressed to the “Pater” from Hildegard of Bingen’s *Ordo Virtutum*, a miracle opera for nuns. I find in these phrases a contrasting but equally profound representation of a relationship between a woman and her father.

– Lisa Bielawa

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