

An Archive of the musical compositions by Herb Bielawa

Composition: **Piano Four Hands Pieces**

Demons 1:48

Ghosts 3:21

Metron 5:32

Mirage 2:15

Nocturne 6:08

Shadows 3:21

Date: 1978, 2006–2010

Durations above

Recordings: by Sandra Soderlund and Herb Bielawa, or computer

Program Notes:

Demons got its name from its frenetic wild unrelenting drive. Sixteenth notes rush coldly from beginning to nearly the end. The opening six measures of “terror” are played alone by the Primo part; then the Secondo has six measures of its own of terror. The tessitura of the Primo part is kept high and that of the Secondo, low, so contrasts remain severe. The duration of the trading off of parts diminishes slowly from six measure each to five, then four, three, two and one. Then trading off lasts for only two beats, then double notes and finally single notes back and forth. By that time a welcome silence arrives; though the piece ends only after both parts slam together for the first time into a short episode of sixteenth notes and they end suddenly on one held chord, the only held entity in the piece.

The important happening in *Ghosts* is the subtle rise of a complex sound that doesn't seem to have come from anywhere. That's because the Secondo player quietly depresses certain cluster chords along the way, holding them with the *sostenuto* pedal. The chords' pitches are energized by the “chop” chords played by the Primo part. The silent strings are not activated by hammers, but by the resonance from the chords in the upper piano part ... like ghost sounds.

A composer can spend most of his or her life avoiding certain musically self-imposed “no-no's”. For me, even in severely dissonant textures, I have always avoided the appearance of parallel fifths or octaves. But it occurred one day to go *way over* this usual restraint by writing piece that specialized in parallel octaves! *Metron* was this piece. It turned out to be very toccata-like but instead of calling it a toccata, *Metron* seemed like a more appropriate and colorful title. The title, obviously, is a fragment of the word, metron(ome).

Mirage holds a very tonal phrase that repeats several times. But on top of that is a cloudy haze of non-tonal lines blurring the simple tonal phrases as if what is heard is perhaps not heard; a mirage.

Nocturne is an austere, mystical, even trance-like piece. Its sense of emotional detachment is caused to some degree by its unsynchronized ensemble. Even though each piano part is explicitly notated, they are independent of each other, performing unmetred

randomly spaced gestures throughout. (There are NEVER any performances that are identical.) ALL Secondo notes are to be muted with the right hand fingers (at the point where the copper winding starts), while the other hand (left) plays the notes on the keys. The right hand must locate each string for the upcoming note and stop it BEFORE striking the key.

As a nocturne (“night music”) this work comes the closest to being programmatic for me. It tells no story, but the image is of a view of the ocean on the French Riviera at 2 AM from a balcony where nothing stirs but the surf. The only light was from dim outside lamps. There was a little fog; it was chilly. It was a serene and mysterious experience that I will never forget.

Shadows has a dangle of gentle melodic threads that gather haphazardly into its general texture. Its rhythm is free as dictated by random and chance phrases.