

An Archive of the musical compositions by Herb Bielawa

Composition: Six Chorale Preludes on *Ton-y-Botel* – organ solo
Giocoso – *Cantilena* – *Canone Doppio* – *Cadenza* – *Preghiera* – *Maestoso*

Date: 1995

Duration: 16:14 complete

Recording: by Pamela Decker, organ

Program Note:

Ton-y-Botel is a Welch expression for “Tune in a bottle.” Legend has it that this tune was, indeed, found in a bottle! In Christian church hymnals it is also called *Ebenezer*. I have been drawn to this hymn for many years for several reasons: it has a haunting melody, its harmony is solid and gratifying, it has a wonderful rhythmic lilt and the text by Thomas John Williams is especially powerful. For a composer one of the common joys is inventing new and interesting settings of famous hymn or chorale tunes. The matter can involve new harmonies, unusual textures, extended counterpoint, color, drama, and more. Along with those, a composer may also find fun in hiding the tune within the fibers of the prelude’s texture. The tune can also serve as a formal structure. Imitative counterpoint is often used as well. In *Giocoso*, the tune is in the pedal for several measures but turns into a fugal subject in partial imitation. Pedal and fugal versions return several times. Each fugal return carries the subject deeper into a full blown exposition. In *Cantilena* the tune is imbedded inside the staccato “peppering” of the texture. *Canone Doppio* is a double canon with fragments of the tune in the pedal. Each canonic voice is a laminate of itself and its accompaniment which gives the movement its title. *Cadenza* is a flourish for the pedals where the tune is laced into the rush of sixteenth notes with a few commentaries on the manuals. *Preghiera* is a prayer in which very delicate flakes of sound accompany the pedal where the tune is. But the tune has had its normal rhythm altered perhaps beyond recognition. *Maestoso* is a grand finale with the tune appearing in the manuals and pedal alternately. The tune’s harmony is new and the robust swagger of its rhythm is an amplification of the tune’s natural underlying characteristic.

The pieces were sketched while accompanying the American organist, Sandra Soderlund, on her European organ concert in 1995. These six preludes serve as a concert set if played in the order printed. Otherwise, they all can find places in the Christian service from prelude, offertory and postlude.