

An Archive of the musical compositions by Herb Bielawa

Composition:

Brass 'n' Jacks – harpsichord solo

Date: 1981

Duration: 6:41

Recording: Sandra Soderlund, harpsichord

Program Note:

Brass 'n' Jacks is a playful piece, purposely engaged in dressing up the stately harpsichord as a fun-loving courtesan. The title, of course, refers to brass strings and pluck jacks, the innards of a harpsichord. The title also suggests the image of a saloon with its brass rails, rounds of Black Jacks and the sound of an upright piano playing rags. The work is in three obvious sections. The outer ones are, for the most part, close duplicates. In them is an ongoing melodic essay which is constructed melodically by transporting the motive d, f, g, (0,3,5 subset) throughout the tonal field. These sections convey a “laid back” jazz mood through its use of jazz harmonies and rhythms. The midsection features a real melody. Its complete form is not heard, however, until its last appearance. All earlier appearances of it are in ever-lengthening fragments of it. Each subsequent attempt to complete itself is only partially successful. Only in the last statement is it complete. By that time the listener should have become fairly familiar with the whole melody, since it would have been restated so many times. Trills and tremoli separate each melodic entrance.