

An Archive of the musical compositions by Herb Bielawa

Composition:

Ants – soprano, violin, and piano

Date: 1985

Duration: 10:00

Recording: Lisa Bielawa, soprano; Bruce Bielawa, violin; Herb Bielawa, piano

Program Note:

Ants was composed for a special concert in June of 1985 and was written specifically for my children, Bruce and Lisa, and myself. I wanted an upbeat piece to end our concert. As their father, I was well-acquainted with their technical abilities and experiences as performers. The text I chose was Robert Frost's *Departmental*: all about ants! Somehow *Ants* seemed a more appropriate title, however. Some of the musical gestures in *Ants* are suggestive of the scurrying of these small creatures, such as the 32nd note mutterings in the piano and violin parts. Other gestures are simply for virtuosic display. Frost's delightful account of the ways of ants includes the death of ant Jerry McCormic. For Jerry's funeral I wrote a dirge with references (naturally) to Chopin! In *Ants*, each instrument takes its turn as a solo, as an accompaniment, and as a counterpoint in general polyphony. Unity factors come from the melodic strands of the opening bars of the work.

Text:

Departmental

An ant on the table cloth
Ran into a dormant moth
Of many times his size.
He showed not the least surprise.
His business wasn't with such.
He gave it scarcely a touch,
And was off on his duty run.
Yet if he encountered one
Of the hive's enquiry squad
Whose work is to find out God
And the nature of time and space,
He would put him onto the case.
Ants are a curious race;
One crossing with hurried tread
The body of one of their dead
Isn't given a moment's arrest-
Seems not even impressed.
But he no doubt reports to any
With whom he crosses antennae,
And they no doubt report
To the higher up at court.
Then word goes forth in Formic:

'Death's come to Jerry McCormic,
Our selfless forager Jerry.
Will the special Janizary
Whose office it is to bury
The dead of the commissary
Go bring him home to his people.
Lay him in state on a sepal.
Wrap him for shroud in a petal.
Embalm him with ichor of nettle.
This is the word of your Queen.'
And presently on the scene
Appears a solemn mortician;
And taking formal position
With feelers calmly atwiddle,
Seizes the dead by the middle,
And heaving him high in air,
Carries him out of there.
No one stands round to stare.
It is nobody else's affair.
It couldn't be called ungentle.
But how thoroughly departmental.

-Robert Frost (by permission)

