

An Archive of the musical compositions by Herb Bielawa

Composition: **Earth** – flute, clarinet, violin, cello, baritone voice, and piano

Date: 2001

Duration: 9:28

Recording: by Sounds New – Lenora Warkentin, flute; Richard Mathias, clarinet; Brooke Aird, violin; Cathy Allen, cello; Eric Howe, baritone; and Herb Bielawa, piano

Program Note:

Several years ago I searched in vain for cosmological poetry. It occurred to me that perhaps Carl Sagen had written some. He told me that he had none but he knew someone who did: Diane Ackerman. In fact she had written a whole book of poetry on planetary topics. What a find! But then I immediately had another problem - now I had too many poems from which to choose. Ackerman's *Earthshine* was, however, the right length and it was close to home (!). While writing the piece, the vision of the "blue marble" in space passed through my mind often. The surprising euphony of the work seemed odd even to me; perhaps a consequence of the haunting image of the quiet "Blue Marble" against black of space.

Text:

EARTHSHINE

Mars and Jupiter stud the sky with light.
I watch them nightly, and try to understand
that I am on a planet, a planet, like they are
planets. I think of Mercury, pockmarked
by the Sun's yellow fever, of that flossy
white node in the galactic marrow called Venus,
of Saturn with its pussyfoot ice,
of cyclops Jupiter in a pinstripe suit,
whose pearly moons at like bons mots,
of Neptune, whose breath is ammonia,
of gangrene Uranus, ghoul of the heavens,
of Pluto, rock-ribbed as a die-hard comet.
But what vision could bridle my own
Earth-planet, so headstrong and diverse?
I look out to see what the broadleafed evergreen
and chickadee are making of the weather.
If the birds puff fat, it'll be in the 30's.
If rhododendron leaves fold like praying hands,
much icier. Like this planet, I'm full
for example: Galileo, contemplating the Earth,
once muttered under his breath,
"It moves."

Wrapped in a light-blue shell,
Earth croons air and ocean color
like the egg of some extinct bird
left to ripen in solar heat,
its jelly thick and mellow.
Blinding white clouds rally
and sprawl through tufted fleece
and high patchy swirls that blur
the whole planet
rolling beneath them like a code.
But here and there, through hazy
cloudgaps, the oceans and continents
blink their pastels, tingeing
gaily into one another
all their hard divides.
From afar, no human ken
or brow sweat comes to light,
only a deluxe planet,
crop-happy as a citadel, bustling
behind its frigid black moat.

Diane Ackerman
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