

Program Notes by *Crystal Godfrey LaPoint*

My Sonata for Bassoon & Piano was written for and dedicated to bassoonist David Ross, who premiered the work with me as pianist in a 1988 concert at the Syracuse University School of Music. The work's three movements — I. Marziale, II. Pastorale, & III. Il Ponte di Londra — are quite different from one another in tempo and character, providing an engaging balance of stylistic variety. Yet each movement in its own way, stems from my profound and enduring fondness for vocal music.

As a composer and performer whose career had been devoted primarily to choral music and music for solo voice, I undertook with this sonata, the challenge of writing a chamber work that was purely instrumental, but still reflective of the melodic writing idiomatic to my vocal repertoire. The bassoon seemed ideal for the project, not because it is inherently difficult for that instrument to “sing,” but on the contrary — because its elegantly lyrical and expressive personality was (and still is) so rarely celebrated by today's composers.

In the first movement, the bassoon sets the tone with a jovial, march-like melody, after which the piano establishes the framework of the movement with a crisply-syncopated ostinato bass. This motoric rhythmic motif is reiterated at the end of the movement, offset in the middle portion by a high-register, bell-

like ostinato. In contrast, the bassoon's “voice” presents elegantly sweeping and sustained melodic gestures — almost defiantly so at the beginning and end, until it finally returns to the sprightliness of the introduction.

The second movement (written first among the three) actually began life as a song intended for baritone and piano. Though never completed in that form, the music from that setting survives in this movement in its opening and closing passages. At the center is a more flowing melody in mixed meter — a poetically simple line that at first repeats, and then becomes more varied as the underlying harmony and texture evolve and blossom in the piano part.

Inspiration for the third movement arose from songs of a different kind — those sung by and for children — or more specifically, from the mischievously repetitive starting, interrupting, and re-starting of a musical toy by a toddler (my son, Kyle.) The tune *London Bridge is Falling Down* first appears in disjointed fragments, and then takes on longer, more varied and more coherent shapes, while portions of *Mary Had a Little Lamb* subtly emerge. In the final moments, all culminates first as a brief fughetta and then as a boisterous Scottish reel, until at last, both nursery tunes are heard, contrapuntally combined and gleefully undisguised.