



David Ludwig (b. 1972)

Aria Fantasy (2013)

My piano quartet *Aria Fantasy* was written for Ravinia's Steans Institute to commemorate its 25th anniversary. Anniversaries always make me think about provenance and tradition, and ultimately about the origins of things. As I think about such esteemed musical institutions as Steans and Ravinia, I think about all of the wonderful performances of canonical works of Western music that have taken place there. And Bach immediately comes to mind as the beginning of that repertoire.

SPOILER ALERT! If you would like to continue in blissful ignorance of the inner workings of this piece as they reveal themselves, I please invite you to turn to a different page now...

"*Aria Fantasy*" draws its inspiration from the first movement Aria of Bach's Goldberg Variations; though it does not sound like Bach's music (with a few notable exceptions). It is in this way another kind of variations on his theme, as it takes individually from each section of the aria to create new patterns and textures of sound, rather than systematically create new patterns and textures of sound, rather than systematically create new movements on a single bass-line as Bach's towering work does.

As the story goes, the Goldbergs were composed to be played for a royal patron who suffered from insomnia (this is probably not a true account, but it's a good story, so I went with it). In this telling the Goldbergs are pieces written for the wee hours of the night, composed to accompany a restive mind. That idea of "night music" provides a backdrop for the music of my piece, which drifts in and out of states of waking dreams. Starry sounds of toy boxes playing distant themes lead to strident and angular piano solos, which lead to long slow falling scales which in turn lead to fast and irregular music of crooked dances, which then continue...

Each section of my *Aria Fantasy* is inspired by corresponding phrases of the Bach Aria, until near the end, where all of the previous variations on the Aria's parts are blurred together as in a dream. As the sound gathers, the central chord of the piece is loudly sounded twenty-five times (in honor of the Steans anniversary) like a ringing bell. These sonorities crescendo into a loud and raucous climax that ends in the sound of rolling and thundering clouds. And at the end of the work, those clouds part to reveal the source.

"*Aria Fantasy*" was commissioned by Welz Kauffman and Ravinia's Steans Music Institute for the 25th Anniversary of the RSMI Program for Piano and Strings in 2013.

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