

## Brent A. Milam

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### **Between the Walls** *for flute, clarinet, cello, and marimba (or piano)* (2010) 10:15

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|------------------|------|
| i. Veil          | 3:15 |
| ii. Etoiles      | 2:30 |
| iii. Off Balance | 4:30 |

**Program Notes:** Those familiar with my compositions may find *Between the Walls* a stylistic departure from other recent works; however, although stylistically dissimilar, the fundamental method of construction is the same. I would describe this compositional methodology as characterized by: 1) a concern with texture as a structural device, 2) jazz-influenced harmonies, 3) the increased rhythmic complexity of polyrhythms and hemiola, and 4) pointillistic impressionism. Regarding the latter, I have always considered my music impressionistic, not in the sense of conveying a particular image, my music leaning toward more absolute than deliberately programmatic ideas, but rather in regards to conveying something that is otherwise inexpressible – something for which the music would be superfluous if words could articulate its meaning.

In terms of pointillism, this connection to impressionism became clear while viewing a painting by Georges Seurat. It occurred to me that his pointillistic technique of applying color was exactly what I was trying to do with sound. Although the association seems obvious to me now, at the time, it was quite an exhilarating and even liberating realization. I tend to construct my compositions in small units of sound often obsessing over minute details of timbre, harmony, note placement, etc. Nevertheless, it is not my intent that the listener should notice the numerous tiny details, but rather perceive their combined effect as a coherent whole. More recently, I have found a comparison to the geometric conglomerations of Salvador Dali's "nuclear mysticism" period, such as "Raphaelesque Head Exploding," an even more apt association.

In regards to the present work, *Between the Walls*, once again the focus on texture, harmony, rhythm, and their expression through small units of sound is the same. The first movement, "Veil," is based on the idea of something concealed – the hint of something suggested but never directly stated. In this case, the outer musical texture masks the piano work of a particularly popular Romantic composer. The second movement, "Etoiles," is an attempt to evoke the wonder of looking at stars and contemplating vast distances. And finally, the entire last movement is based on a single two-measure idea. Throughout this movement, the notes of this two-measure motif are selectively removed (or "sampled") to create various ascending and descending lines with asymmetrical rhythmic relationships. The juxtaposition of such rhythms is the basis of its title, "Off Balance." As the music progresses, notes gradually return to the abbreviated motif until the unaltered two-measure idea is finally stated in its entirety at the end of the work.