

### Three for Five: program note

Three for Five was commissioned by Sunday Afternoons of Music and completed in early 2010. It was written for the Amernet String Quartet with guest cellist Gary Hoffman, and it is a privilege for me to collaborate with such wonderful musicians. Three for Five is an approximately 18-minute work, played continuously from beginning to end but articulated in nine distinct sections. Each section is clearly distinguished by its character, speed, and by the specific and limited collection of pitches from which I allowed it to be made. While Three for Five does not musically represent a non-musical entity—it does not tell a story or describe a scene from nature, for example—it does lead the listener through a musical journey that begins and ends with the same material, although at the end this material is substantially transformed. The title of the piece refers to the nine sections, divided into three groups of three—each group sharing the distinguishing characteristics which I described above.

By virtue of its instrumentation, Three for Five is—and will be, to the extent that it continues to be performed in the future—inevitably bound to the C-major Schubert String Quintet, in the sense that many if not most concerts of string quintets come about through an invitation extended by a string quartet to a cellist friend for the primary purpose of playing the Schubert, one of the pillars of the chamber music literature. And although the Schubert is a very long work (it usually clocks in at about 50') it isn't quite long enough to occupy an entire concert, therefore producing the need for something else to be added to the program. My first instinct was to write a work that would actually refer to the Schubert, maybe even parallel it in some way. However, after many attempts at finding a convincing approach along these lines, I eventually decided to develop a concept that is quite different from that of the Schubert. For one, my work really features the guest cellist while in the Schubert, all five parts are more or less equal in importance. For another, my work is continuous yet broken into sharply contrasting sections, while the Schubert is in four movements, each of which is internally very consistent. Finally, the Schubert moves through its paces at a grand, leisurely pace, while mine is considerably more compact and lean. Of course there are also differences of language and musical grammar, but this is a natural consequence of one piece being generated in the context of early 19th-century European culture while the other emerged in early 21st-century North America.

I hope that by presenting both pieces in one concert, it will be possible to experience both the variety and the richness of this wonderful combination of instruments, which deserves a significant expansion of its literature. I hope my work makes a contribution to that expansion.

Joel Hoffman  
(2010)