

Riffs on a Great Life
program note

In 2003, I was commissioned by Christopher Karp to write a trio for violin, cello and piano. The piece, called *Piano Trio 2: "Lost Traces"*, was performed later that year on the Karp Family Labor Day concert in Madison with Christopher playing violin, Parry playing cello and Howard playing the piano part. On top of the wonderful performance of the trio by all three musicians, this was my introduction to the warmth, beauty and elegance of Howard's piano playing as well as to a man of breathtaking generosity and humanity.

Some time after Christopher commissioned this new cello and piano piece last year, I realized that the new work would have to be about Howard in some way. I am not normally a composer of program music (music in which there are explicit references to extra-musical elements), but this was a project that made its demands very clear to me. I asked Christopher and Parry (separately) to tell me which piano pieces they thought Howard was especially close to, and two works emerged in particular: the Schubert Sonata in B flat, D960 and the Schumann Fantasy in C major op. 17. After I listened to Howard's gorgeous recordings of these two pieces, I was sure I would have to incorporate bits and pieces of them as little windows into Howard's musical world. I also knew that these musical references would have to allude to Howard's sense of humor as well as to his encyclopedic knowledge of music repertoire. Therefore, some of these references will be clear to the listener while others are buried under the surface of the music.

Riffs on a Great Life is just that: a musical story told in semi-rhyming phrases about the rich, long and wonderful life of a beloved musician and friend.

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August 2016