

Sonata for Cello and Piano
program note

The *Sonata for Cello and Piano* was composed in 1982 and is dedicated to the composer's brother, cellist Gary Hoffman. A dark and introspective study in autumnal hues, the sonata provides a sharp contrast to the hard, bright colors of *Cubist Blues*. Its harmonic palette blends dodecaphonic and freely chromatic elements into a richly expressive idiom.

The first movement begins with a syncopated progression of six dyads, stated by the cello in double stops. This progression, which could be called the "motto" since it recurs at important points in both movements, is expanded into an ostinato out of which the piano emerges in its lowest register. After the piano ascends in a slow canonic swirl, the cello reenters with a searing rhapsodic lament. A resonant pizzicato chord marks the beginning of a transitional passage (a long, slow trill in the piano that horizontalizes the first dyad of the motto before cascading into a chromatic abyss). After a brief fermata, a brittle piano chord ushers in the second section, in which a jazzy, motoric 12-note ostinato plucked by the cello accompanies an angular counterpoint in the extreme registers of the piano. A brief transition leads back to a melodic statement of the motto in the cello and further development of the material of the first section. This is followed by another transition and a compressed reworking of the second section in the piano. The movement concludes quietly with a brooding coda which features the motto.

In the second movement (cast in ternary form with coda), the contained tension of the first movement explodes into a ferocious scherzo. After the savagely rhythmical opening, in which the cello and piano whirl from their bottom to their top registers, an elegiac middle section rife with tremulous arabesques, liquescent piano scales and arching cantabile lines for the cello ensues. But this contemplative still point provides only a temporary refuge from harsh passions, and soon the music sweeps back into the surging maelstrom of the opening material. After a strident climax, elements of both the first movement and the middle section of the second movement mingle in a hushed coda that concludes, ominously, with fragments of the motto.