

Self-Portrait with JS
program note

Self-Portrait with JS is one of a series of compositions in which my music is connected to pre-existing musical works by other composers. The first one of this series, *Self-Portrait with Mozart*, began its life as the completion of the first movement of Mozart's unfinished *Concerto for Violin, Piano and Orchestra*, and then evolved into a four-movement 'conversation' between Mozart's music and my own. The second work, *Self-Portrait with Gebirtig* is a three-movement concerto for solo cello and chamber orchestra, and incorporates three melodies of the Polish-Jewish folk composer and poet, Mordechai Gebirtig--thereby creating a conversation between my own melodic/harmonic language and the hauntingly beautiful melodies of Gebirtig. The present work is the third in the series and the fourth (to date), *Self-Portrait with Orlando*, is a work for three flutes which interpolates, quotes and deconstructs a vocal motet by the 16th century Flemish composer Orlando di Lasso.

Self-Portrait with JS (for violin, viola and cello), is based on the *Sonata for Viola da Gamba and Harpsichord in G major* of J.S. Bach, a work that I find especially beautiful. Unlike the other "Self-Portraits", this work is a little closer to a transcription than an original composition. Each of the four movements follows a progression of events in which--depending on the movement--the music moves either towards or away from the original Bach piece. In all four movements, the number of bars is exactly the same as in the original. However, I have done various things with and to Bach's music. In the first movement, for example, things begin with my having removed most of Bach's notes - even though those that are present are exactly the same notes - and in the same positions - that Bach wrote. As the movement progresses, little by little notes are added via a certain process such that by the end of the movement, the complete fabric of the original is restored. The second movement contrasts this process by beginning just as the Bach does, but gradually interpolating progressively longer passages of 'frozen time'. In the third movement, I used a process that is the converse of the first while in the fourth, something entirely new happens: the music progresses some of the time as in the original and at other times it abruptly and unpredictably spins its wheels with crazy sequences that would have made Bach dizzy!

The result of these processes is twofold: the listener will obviously hear the original Bach from a different angle; and at the same time what will also emerge is a musical portrait of me, the other composer--thus creating a fantasy conversation between us.

Joel Hoffman (2014)