

Piano Trio 2: Lost Traces
Program Note

Having now composed two piano trios, it has become apparent that this medium inspires me to write music *about* something—specifically about other music. The first trio, called Cubist Blues, is a work that deals with a number of facets of the blues. It is not actually a blues piece, but it is *about* the blues.

My second trio, Lost Traces is about my recent opera, The Memory Game. Again, it is not actually a series of excerpts from the opera itself, but it is *about* the opera. The piece begins with some music that, while not from the opera itself, could very well have been a passage from somewhere within it. The trio then continues with some faster music that is actually based on a scene from the opera, but develops the material in a new way. And so it goes throughout the trio—alternating between newly-developed actual opera material and opera-like material. However, the connection to The Memory Game ends here: the structure of Lost Traces is distinctively instrumental, not operatic—that is: it flows according to the logic of instrumental music (presentation of various materials and subsequent combining and recombining of them), not the logic of operatic music (musical setting of the theatrical narrative).

One other feature of Lost Traces which I'd like to mention: the rather striking use of silence in this piece. While composing the work, it became clear to me that as a structurally and dramatically significant element in music, silence can exert considerable power. This is something new for me—my previous music generally has been something like an intense and continuous conversation in musical sound. The inclusion of silence as a much more than incidental part of the sound of music is, for me, an experiment. My wish is that the silences in the piece will enrich the parts that sound, and vice versa.

Piano Trio 2: Lost Traces was commissioned by Christopher Karp for the trio which also includes his pianist father Howard and cellist brother Parry. As a pianist and composer, I have enjoyed many years of music-making with my own brothers, parents and sister, all of whom are professional musicians. For this reason, it was especially gratifying to write a work destined for another musical family—while writing it, I truly felt at home!

Joel Hoffman