

Piano Trio on C#  
program note

My third trio, "Piano Trio on C#" (2004) follows "Cubist Blues" (1991) and "Piano Trio #2 'Lost Traces'" (2003). "Cubist Blues" was composed for and first performed by the Golub-Kaplan-Carr Trio, while the second and third trios were commissioned by Christopher Karp for performances by Christopher, Parry and Howard Karp. If these two latter pieces could be called "biological" children of the Karps, then we would have to use the word "adopted" to describe "Cubist Blues", as they have--with Frances Karp as pianist--generously brought my first trio into their world as well. This is the kind of musical friendship that composers live for! While I was writing the second trio, I had some idea of the individual and collective personalities of the Karps. But with the third (having heard them perform the second last fall), I was keenly aware of the artistry that would be given to each note, each phrase, each musical idea. I'd like to believe that this knowledge gave me the means to probe more fully into both the depth of this wonderful collective musical talent as well as into the medium of the piano trio itself--a medium I find inexhaustible in its variety of expression.

The "Piano Trio on C#" is so named because of the fact that all three movements revolve around that note. The word "on" is used instead of the traditional "in" to signify that the connection is not that of tonality (as in "C# major or minor") but rather that of architecture. In other words, the note C# (not the key of C#) functions as a musical anchor towards which all three movements inevitably gravitate.

This "gravitational pull" is most evident in the third movement, less so in the second, and even less so in the first--although it too ends clearly on C#. There is also more emotional and temporal weight associated with movement three as compared with the other two. The first is a short dance-like scherzo that coyly invites the listener into the music, while the second spreads out into a spacious and gentle aria. But the third poses more complex musical questions, both thematic and structural. It is serious music, but not without occasional playful and tangential moments. This third movement borrows liberally from another recent work of mine, "At What Price?" for piano solo, which--in a more direct way--deals with the unfortunate consequences of the current American administration's foreign policy.

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