

Three Oranges: Program Note

This work was composed in 2006 as a present for my son Benjamin Hoffman, who is a wonderful young violinist, and his friend Christian Smith, an equally gifted young percussionist. Benjamin and Christian had been playing a piece written for violin and marimba and in listening to rehearsals, I was very intrigued by the extraordinarily beautiful sound of this combination of timbres. I was aware of the ground-breaking Marimolin Duo, a Boston-based duo which had been the inspiration for many excellent pieces back in the 1980s and 1990s (very probably the vast majority of pieces composed for this ensemble), but somehow the idea of writing a violin/marimba duo myself didn't materialize until the sound of these instruments were right in front of me many years later!

The title is a result of the fact that Benjamin's favorite color is orange. Once I had that in mind, the titles "Lyric Orange", "Sicilian Orange" and "Intense Orange" quickly emerged, and music began presenting itself in my imagination. Each of the three movements explores its own unique aspect of both the individual instruments' colors and their absorption into the composite duo sound. My intention was to achieve a balance such that overall, neither instrument dominated the other. At times the violin could be the soloist, at times the marimba could take over, and sometimes it would be impossible to tell who was playing what. The first movement is predominantly narrative in nature, although it also introduces a pulsing rhythmic motive that then becomes the basis for the other two movements—slow in the second and very fast in the third. In this way all three movements are linked, suggesting the idea that they are three different musical "shades" of the same overall color.

Joel Hoffman