

Three Paths: program note

Three Paths was commissioned by Christopher Karp and completed in August of 2009. The piece was written for Christopher (pianist) and his brother Parry (cellist). It has been a great privilege for me to collaborate with such wonderful musicians on this as well as several other occasions in the past. As is often the case in which a work of music is commissioned by someone who intends (and is expected by the composer) to perform the piece, the resulting music can reflect specific attributes of the musicians for whom the piece is composed. Two clear examples here: the frequently soaring lyricism of the cello part takes full advantage of Parry's cello voice, just as the musical puns and witticisms reflect those parallel qualities in Christopher.

Three Paths is an approximately 18-minute work, played continuously from beginning to end but articulated in nine distinct sections. Each section is clearly distinguished by its character, speed, and by the specific and limited collection of pitches from which I allowed it to be made. While Three Paths does not musically represent a non-musical entity—that is, it does not tell a story or describe a scene from nature, for example—it does lead the listener through a musical journey that begins and ends with the same material, although at the end this material is substantially transformed. The title of the piece refers to the nine sections, divided into three groups of three—each group sharing the distinguishing characteristics which I described above.

Last point: Three Paths is the first of two fraternal twins; the other is called Three for Five and is scored for solo cello with string quartet. Both pieces tell the same musical story; indeed the solo cello part in the latter is almost identical to the cello part of the former, while the piano part of Three Paths was substantially re-worked in order to fit into the sound world of the string quartet.

Joel Hoffman
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