

#### Piano Trio 4: program note

Several times, I've transformed a composition of mine from one medium into another. Sometimes it is a simple transcription; sometimes it's an arrangement in which the source work is easily recognizable in the transformed version but there are substantial differences; and sometimes the connections between the one and the other are tangible but probably only evident to the composer and perhaps the performers of the work. Piano Trio No. 4 is such a work and in this case, the connection is very direct. The source work is a set of piano pieces called nine pieces for piano, which was written about a year before this piano trio version emerged.

The structure of this work is very rigorous: All of the nine movements follow either of two models:

(a) 48 bars in 4/4 time with a speed of quarter = 96; or total duration of exactly 2 minutes. The movements that follow model (a) are 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9.

(b) 24 bars in 4/4 time with a speed of quarter = 96; or total duration of exactly 1 minute. The movements that follow model (b) are 2, 4, 6 and 8.

In model (a), the music is set in the following pattern:

4 bars of sound, 2 bars of silence, 5 sound, 2 silence, 7 sound, 2 silence, 9 sound, 2 silence, 7 sound, 3 silence, 5 sound

In model (b), the music is set in the following pattern:

6 sound, 2 silence, 7 sound, 3 silence, 6 sound

Thus the totals are (a) 10 minutes (two minutes x five pieces) + (b) four minutes (one minute x four pieces) for a total duration of 14 minutes.

The silences between pieces are also organized: the trio is to count beats in tempo according to the following symmetrical scheme (where underlined numbers refer to beats):

1 | 20 | 2 | 18 | 3 | 15 | 4 | 11 | 5 | 11 | 6 | 15 | 7 | 18 | 8 | 20 | 9

A prominent feature of this work, therefore, is the organized presence of silence. My intention is that the silences are very much part of the music, such that the sounding parts of the piece articulate silence and equally, the silent parts articulate sound. This highly organized structure is consciously juxtaposed against what I believe is the way we actually experience time in music. For example, we know the term 'perfect pitch' refers to the ability to accurately recognize and reproduce musical notes, and many people possess this ability. Yet very few people have what we could call 'perfect tempo', that is, the ability to accurately recognize and reproduce musical speed. Nor do we seem to be able to accurately sense exact quantities of time in music. So what I am wondering with this piece, where patterns have been created such that the ability to sense speed and time accurately would result in the understanding of clear temporal structure, is how we sense such structure given that our abilities to measure time are far from non-existent and yet not terribly accurate either.

I do want to point out, however, that in spite of all the above, this piece is far from a mere experiment in the human experience of time; it is a piece with musical materials

and an emotional arc, just as in any other of my works. I invite the listener to choose a listening strategy before hearing the work: you might want to try and follow the patterns described above and see what happens, or you might choose to ignore all of that and listen just as you would any other work. I hope the piece can be of value either way, and that it will invite multiple listenings.

Joel Hoffman  
June 2016