

PROGRAM NOTES: “Concerto 4-3”

“Concerto 4-3” was written specifically for, and is dedicated to, Time for Three.

“Concerto 4-3” is a three-movement work that uses the language of Classical music, with dashes of bluegrass technique, to highlight the virtuosity and energy of this inspiring group. I have known Zach, Nick, and Ranaan for quite some time...first as students at Curtis and now as professionals working in the music field. Being aware of all of the types of music that they play (bluegrass, rock, Bach, Beatles), gave me a starting point of inspiration for creating a piece that would spotlight their joy in performing, soulful musicality and prodigious skill.

The work is divided into three movements, with the option for the group to perform cadenzas between each movement. In these performances, Tf3 will be performing a cadenza between movements one and two. The movement titles refer to images from the Smoky Mountains (where I grew up in East Tennessee): “The Shallows”, “Little River”, and “Roaring Smokies”. I wanted to reference the Smokies, because East Tennessee was the first place that I really experienced bluegrass (or as they call it there, Mountain Music).

The first movement, “The Shallows”, incorporates Time for Three’s unique string techniques, which constitute extended techniques that mimic everything from squeaking mice to electric guitars. They are able to shift quickly between these techniques and a straight bluegrass style, without hesitation. Their ability to do this so smoothly reminded me of the parts of the mountain rivers that move in shallow areas, where small rocks and pebbles make for a rapid ride that moves a rafter quickly from one side of the river to the other.

The second movement, “Little River”, is slow-moving and lyrical, very much in hymn-like fashion. This movement reflects the beauty of Little River as it flows through Townsend and Walland, Tennessee. At times there is real serenity and a majestic look to

the water, with no movement obvious on the surface--it resembles pure glass. I was sitting on the back porch of Little River Barbecue, during a gentle rain, when I thought of the design and “sound” of this movement.

The third movement, “Roaring Smokies”, is a fire-like virtuosic movement that shifts and moves very much like a raging river (those wild mountain waters that pour out of the Smokies). It is fun to swim in those cold waters, but your attention must always be alert, as danger lurks...the water goes where it wants and will take you with it.

While “Concerto 4-3” (referring to the Time for Three name) is written in the Classical vein, certain bluegrass techniques have been incorporated into the fabric of the piece: emphasis on offbeats, open strings, and slides. But the language is definitely tonal, 21st Century and American-sounding in style.

This work was commissioned by The Philadelphia Orchestra, the Pittsburgh Symphony, and the Wheeling Symphony. It was premiered in 2008 by the Philadelphia Orchestra, Christoph Eschenbach, conducting.

--Jennifer Higdon