

“Concerto 4-3” is a three-movement concerto, featuring 2 violins and a bass, which uses the language of Classical music, with dashes of bluegrass technique.

The work is divided into three movements, with the option to perform a cadenza between the first and second movements. The movement titles refer to rivers that run through the Smoky Mountains (where growing up, I heard quite a bit of bluegrass): “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 unique extended techniques (a manner of playing beyond the normal way of playing these instruments) that mimic everything from squeaking mice to electric guitars. These sounds resemble 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 pure, glassy surface.

The third movement, “Roaring Smokies”, is a rapid-fire virtuosic movement that shifts and moves very much like a raging river (those wild mountain waters that pour out of the mountains). 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” is written in the Classical vein, with certain bluegrass techniques 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.

-Jennifer Higdon