

Nostalgias

For Piano Trio (1991, rev. 1997)

Jon Jeffrey Grier

The three movements of *Nostalgias* are loosely inspired by events and imagery from my teenage years. I have given the movements names of similar character to reflect their common concern with this period of my life, and also to show that all deal with much of the same melodic and harmonic material; I also simply like the sounds of these words. All three movements are rondo forms. There are some jazz- and rock-derived elements, including the frequent motoric rhythms, the use of repetitions, ostinatos and vamps, some of the harmonic colors, and the layering of the instruments.

"Cantankerous" (1991; revised January 1997) is about my first car, a '64 Ford van, a true rattletrap in which the gearshift once came off in my hand. All of my early driving and, especially, repairing experiences took place in or under this vehicle. It was extremely noisy, seldom in tune, and had holes in the floor offering ample ventilation--a good thing, considering the frequent exhaust leaks. The engine was situated between the front seats, allowing the carburetor to be adjusted while driving, a frequent necessity. The van played an important role in my early music career, being the principal mode of transport for my high school rock band.

At age 13, I went with my parents on an extended camping tour of the American West. "Cavernous" (1991) recalls the highlight of this trip for me, a visit to Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico. It is a place of incredible beauty and mystery, and the experience of it struck a chord with my already considerable infatuation with science and the natural world. The enormous rooms and otherworldly limestone formations (of this and all such caves) impress me in two ways. On the one hand, there is the stillness, the absence of weather, the perfect darkness, and the silent, stoic patience of the processes that create the cave: a stalactite grows at the rate of roughly an inch every 100 years. On the other, there is the incredible grandeur and baroque ornateness of the rock itself, its physical majesty heightened by appreciation of the time and geologic coincidence of conditions required to form it.

My intent in "Calamitous" (1991; completely re-written in the Fall of 1996) is to evoke that omnipresent teenage sense of impending doom, the girlfriends, traffic accidents, questionable fashion choices, and generally complete lack of confidence in all of one's first attempts at adult behavior. These and the other certain disasters of late childhood are remembered now with amusement and not inconsiderable relief. The ritornello (recurring first section) of this movement is in imitative polyphony (a theme is quickly echoed in other parts), suggesting the competing and irreconcilable pressures of school, parents, peers, and one's own hormones. For most teenagers, the car is a bit player in many of these mini-melodramas, and so the van theme from the first movement returns for a couple of cameos.

Nostalgias (formerly titled *Rondoids*) was commissioned by, and is gratefully dedicated to, the Kandinsky Trio of Roanoke College.

Performance Notes

I. Generally project an air of good humor. Play in a strict, steady tempo. Execute the various special effects with lots of panache; don't worry about going over the top. These are the various squeaks and rattles of the car. The brief glissandi should be very broad, not lingering on the 1st note. The piano slaps can be made anywhere within easy reach that gives a good, solid sound. With rehearsal, the improvised ending may well come to be approached in a consistent manner.

II. This movement is quite opposite of the others. Take your time and give all rests and long notes at least their full value; play very expressively, with a little rubato here and there. Pizzicati should be gentle, round, and ringing, evoking the dripping of water. The overall effect should be timeless, colorful, introspective.

III. As in the 1st movement, play in a very strict, steady tempo, without pauses of any kind (excepting most of bars 157-215). The sense of pulsing forward drive should be very strong. Many motives are rhythmically "targeted": the phrasing of the notes should work toward the goal of a concluding accented note (or notes). In the strings, slurs should be regarded as phrase marks, and not necessarily bowings. It is suggested that the staccato 16ths be played with a brush stroke-- not too dry, but not heavy either. The more lyrical string lines in bars 157-194 should be played in a very expressive, gypsy-like manner. "Tap pedaling" in the piano suggests a minimal application of the pedal to enrich the sound and aid in the execution of the indicated phrasing. This movement is tense, moody, and ironic.