

Curtis-Smith's *Trio* for violin, clarinet and piano was written in 2000, supported by a grant from ArtServe Michigan in conjunction with the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs. It is dedicated to the Verdehr Trio.

"The title of the first movement, *Specters*, refers especially to the agitato section with its rushing arpeggio figures in the clarinet and later in the piano. (The clarinet in A is an ideal instrument for spidery, sinister, spectral utterances.) Though the movement begins with stabbing, jagged chords, which soon dissolve into a gentle, lyrical theme (where the clarinet assumes its melodic, singing quality), in the end the sinister element takes over. In the brief, breathless coda, the rapid arpeggios are more widely flung than before, and all three instruments are playing at their registral extremes (the piano, for example, plays both its highest C and its lowest A simultaneously—all in a ghostly, glassy pianissimo).

The second movement, *Largo with a Twist*, is an intense, deeply expressive piece. The more agitated middle section suddenly bursts into an impetuous, dance-like paroxysm, before settling down to the return of the opening material. This return, though, continues to be 'worried' by the restless sixteenth notes of the middle section (heard here as parallel sixths in the violin). The music finally rids itself of these lingering 'doubts' just in time for a sudden, unexpected change of mood. It is here the 'twist' occurs. The change is dramatic enough to catch the listener's attention, perhaps raising the question, 'Where did that come from?' The answer may—or may not—be provided by the last movement.

'Hocketing' is defined thus by the *Harvard Dictionary of Music*: 'In medieval polyphony, the rapid alternation of two or more voices with single notes or short groups of notes, one part sounding while the others rest.' In the third movement, *Happy Canons with Hocketing*, the hocketing results from canons at a very close time interval: three 16ths (and later two or four 16ths, then at the very end, just one 16th!). Usually, these strict canons are at the unison or octave with many rests in each voice, resulting in a complimentary interlocking of two or three voices, or 'one part sounding while the other parts rest.' While I would not have needed to adjust a single note anywhere to make these strict canons work out (which they all do), I have done so anyway, occasionally scrambling the order of a few notes here and there, just to be mischievous.

It should be noted that this movement is extremely difficult to perform—though not, I think, difficult to listen to. While this movement is overtly and unabashedly tonal—it even has traditional key signatures (E-flat major at the beginning, for example)—it may be more difficult to perform than some of the atonal, asymmetrically complex music of the *avant-garde*. As for the *Happy...*, well, the canons were clearly happy and having a lot of fun, so I let them be called that! In the last two measures of the piece, the two-voice canon is separated by only a single 16th, resulting in a reiterated, ricocheting effect, causing the final chords to sound as though the players can't quite manage to end together—all part of the 'fun'."

—C. Curtis-Smith

The world premiere of *Trio* was on January 24, 2001 at Dalton Center Hall, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Curtis Curtis-Smith (1941–2014) was born in Walla Walla, Washington. He received a bachelor's degree from Whitman College where he studied with John Ringgold and David Burge and a master's degree in piano from Northwestern University where he studied with Alan Stout and Guy Mombaerts. He pursued further studies at the University of Illinois with Kenneth Gaburo, the Tanglewood Music Center with Bruno Maderno, and in master classes at the Blossom Music Festival with Pierre Boulez.

Curtis-Smith was the recipient of over one hundred awards, grants and commissions. He received a Guggenheim Fellowship, an award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the Koussevitzky Prize at Tanglewood, the Medaglia d'Oro from the Concorso Internazionale di Musica e Danza, an award from Gian Battista Viotti International Music Competition, the Prix du Salabert, an award from the Concorso Internazionale de Composizione, the State of Michigan Governor's Award, and twenty-six consecutive Standard Awards from ASCAP. In 2001, his *Twelve Etudes for Piano* was selected for the repertoire list for the Eleventh Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. He had grants from the Rockefeller Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council for the Arts, and the Arts Foundation of Michigan. His commissions include ones from the Barlow Endowment and Fromm Foundation.

In 1972, Curtis-Smith "invented" the technique of bowing the piano, using flexible bows made of monofilament nylon line. This technique, exemplified in such pieces as *Rhapsodies* of 1973, has been widely imitated and used by many other composers including George Crumb.

As a pianist, Curtis-Smith presented solo recitals at the National Gallery and the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. He made orchestral appearances with the symphonies of Indianapolis, Seattle, Spokane, and Kalamazoo. In 1986, he premiered *Knockstück* from William Bolcom's *Three Dance Portraits* and the last three etudes of Bolcom's Pulitzer Prize winning *Twelve New Etudes*. He and Bolcom wrote a collaborative piece, *Collusions*, where each composer took turns writing successive phrases of the music.

From 1965–2012, Curtis-Smith was Artist-in-Residence and instructor of composition at Western Michigan University where, at age 38, he became the youngest faculty member ever to be awarded the Distinguished Faculty Scholar Award, the university's highest academic honor.