

## SCOTT JOHNSON

### ROCK (1990) (from Rock/Paper/Scissors)

*Rock* is the opening movement of a five movement work, *Rock/Paper/Scissors*. Like the music itself, this quartet of violin, cello, electric guitar, and synthesizer is a hybrid of elements from the classical tradition and the rock music that I grew up with. There is one mood that was common in both older classical works and rock, but rare in 20th century High Modernist music: a broadly optimistic emotional quality.

*Rock/Paper/Scissors* focuses on this mood, and pairs it with a modern way of producing music that comes from outside of the classical tradition. The amplified technologies of our popular musics allow a small ensemble to generate a powerful physical presence that previously was available only by adding musicians. The evolution of the orchestra sometimes looked like an arms race towards the biggest sound. So as I wrote *Rock*, I thought of it as a cross between a rock band and a pocket-sized orchestra; a powerful presence from small forces.

### Convertible Debts (1996)

*Convertible Debts* is part of a lifelong series of works that began with my 1980-82 work *John Somebody*, which to my knowledge was the first piece to use the transcribed pitches and rhythms of a recorded speaking voice as the basis for an instrumental score. The technique is based on a simple observation: although the pitches of speech are rarely stable or exact, when they are placed against a tonal center, the ear will tend to hear a phrase as being in a mode or key. Similarly, repeated syllables will seem to resolve into a rhythm more regular than reality. This technique spread as digital sampling became common in the mid-1980s.

For *Convertible Debts*, I asked friends to call someone and ask for a favor. People making a slightly embarrassing request like this will unconsciously use a wider pitch range, giving me more interesting melodies to translate into instrumental lines. Favors between people can become debts, part of the many quiet networks of society.

### Maybe You (1999)

*Maybe You* is written for the same electro-acoustic quartet as *Convertible Debts*, and in fact was originally conceived of as an extension of that work. But I quickly decided that it would be a very different animal: the only words in *Maybe You* are its title. This single sample of my own voice, wavering closely around a single pitch, is used to generate an abstract meditation on desire and emotional exchange. Unlike most of my voice sampling pieces, where instruments approximate and reproduce the real pitches of recorded phrases, *Maybe You* spreads this lone phrase across the keyboard, producing everything from a low, droning ostinato at the bottom to a high, chattering digital chorus. Sonically, the sample becomes an organ with a slightly different tempo attached to each key, slow at the bottom and fast at the top. Verbally, it's only an inarticulate longing, given shape by the score.