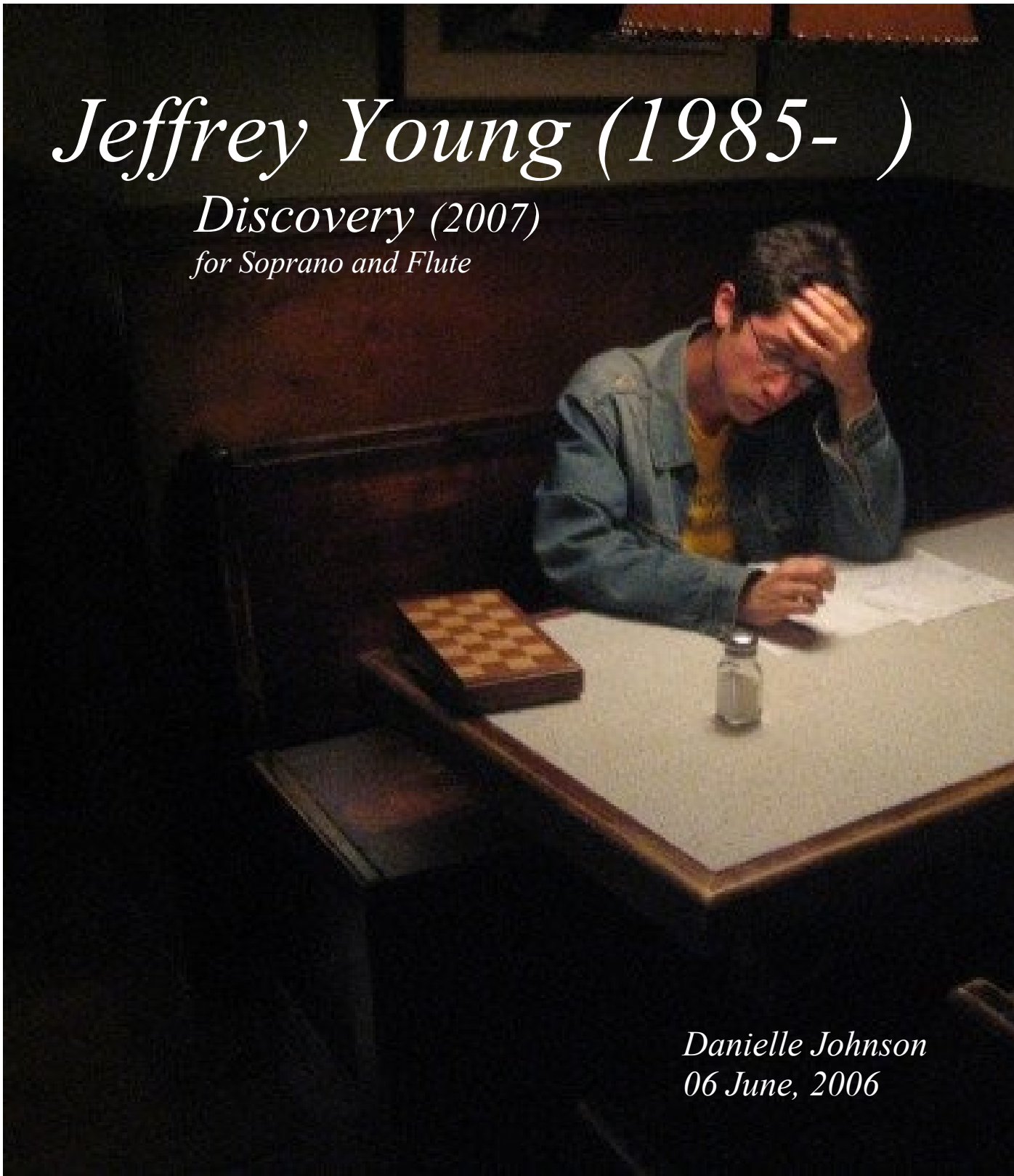


# *Jeffrey Young (1985- )*

*Discovery (2007)  
for Soprano and Flute*



*Danielle Johnson  
06 June, 2006*

Jeffrey Young is known to his friends as a spontaneous guy—someone “completely unconcerned with normal social scruples... inquisitive and madly curious” (Ben Groth, Oberlin Junior). Jeffrey’s personality is off the wall, strangely charming, and rarely serious. Yet it is the serious aspect of music that attracts him to the field, “although it’s also important to me that music be fun,” Jeffrey said in a telephone interview.

A recent graduate of Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio, Jeffrey Young’s name can already be found in almost every realm of the music world: as a classical violinist, a rock musician, a fiddler, a jazz improviser, and as an emerging young composer. His versatility and experience in multiple fields give him the ability to apply his diverse musical skills to his compositions. Jeffrey is “always trying something new,” said his friend Ben Groth, and this certainly appears to be the case with Jeffrey’s compositional style.

A small sampling of Jeffrey’s compositions include *Arabesque*, a virtuosic work for solo violin, *Point de Départ*, a twelve-tone orchestral piece, *Sacrifice*, a clarinet duet, and *Stravinsky vs. Batman*, a quintet for violin, viola, bass, marimba, and harp. “I don’t know if there is one process of writing pieces that I’ve decided on yet,” said Jeffrey, “I was trying to use a different process each time I started a new [piece] to learn something different. So with the solo violin piece...I had been stuck for a long time...and then I woke up in the middle of the night one night and...opened up some Paganini Caprices and decided to use one as my model. The two-clarinet piece I recorded myself singing, then improvising over the top of it, then I transcribed it and edited it keeping the quality and sort of the form of the original.” *Discovery*, Jeffrey’s duet for soprano and flute, written over the course of his senior year in college, followed more of an “intuitive” process.

Jeffrey started with sketches of the gestures of the piece, not even on staff paper. “I didn’t really try to plan harmonic issues in this piece at all,” he said. Time signatures were only added to the score after the first rehearsal.

*Discovery* is a single-movement composition, about seven minutes in length, one that takes full advantage of the acoustic and technical abilities of both the flute and the soprano voice. The piece uses square, triangle, plus signs, and “X” noteheads to delineate various articulations (low breath sounds without pitch, tongue rams, key clicks, and tongue pizz respectively). At various points throughout the piece, Jeffrey asks the flutist to close off the mouthpiece with the mouth so that the pitches sound down a seventh.

The work is based largely on rhythmic gestures--especially glissandi and downward spiraling thirty-second note runs--and on the exploitation of range and dynamics within both voices. Jeff notes that his “piece really isn’t about harmony...although the pitches C and F# are important...but I think it’s a very horizontal piece. Sometimes it’s about counterpoint. Mostly it’s about the interaction between the two voices. I very much thought of them as characters.”

*Discovery* opens with a rhapsodic flute solo—in Jeff’s mind, it is the entrance of a “little flute animal.” The flute is then interrupted by an accented entrance in the vocal line—“Fuh!” and the flute animal scurries away, frightened, with a downward fingered glissando. Jeff thinks of the soprano character as a “girl...with childlike qualities,” qualities which are made clear to the listener by the broken syllables of the word “flute” used in the text. The soprano soloist never actually says the complete word “flute,” although Jeff says that he considered the idea but eventually rejected it as trite.

The piece continues with conversations, “dances, and negotiations” between the two characters as they learn to accommodate themselves to the other’s presence. These interactions play off of one another, and are often rhythmically imitative, sometimes harmonically as well. In moments when they do converge, most notably in measure 75, the result is unexpected and charming.

Each rehearsal letter (“A” through “E”) divides the piece into these sectional “dances” and negotiations. The first section is the flute solo; the next section begins with the entrance of the soprano and includes their subsequent introductions. The “B” section (actually the third section) is marked as slower, and the rhythmic gestures here are shorter and separated by rests, resulting in a hesitant sounding conversation. Section “C” (number four) reintroduces larger groupings of sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and an increase in density. The fifth section (“D”) features slurred and longer notes and fingered glissandi and other fragmented gestures. The final section begins with a slow series of sixteenths and eventually includes motivic elements from the entire composition. Not only do these sections serve to develop and expand upon Jeffrey’s motives, they also expand and develop his “characters,” which Jeffrey says that he wants his audience to sense but not necessarily understand.

Jeffrey experimented with several different endings to *Discovery*, trying to “decide whether the flute should dominate the human or the human dominate the flute.” The eventual denouement seems to favor the flute, although the soprano gets in the last word. The last four bars consist of three repeated bars in which Jeff asks the flutist to hit the highest note possible at the highest dynamic level possible, followed by a descending “Flah-lllll” in the soprano from the highest note possible to the lowest note possible,

repeated three times, each getting progressively lower, and finally a held middle “C” in the soprano. The effect on the listener of these glissandi and extreme ranges is that the flute sounds dominant and the soprano seems to fall away defeated with a sigh. The final text is “luuuu-te,” completing the final syllables of the word “flute.”

Jeffrey Young’s *Discovery* is an innovative work that stretches the boundaries between music, dance, and drama. The piece is a *Discovery* in multiple senses: the composer uncovers a new composition and a new way to write for soprano and flute, a female child finds a “flute animal,” the audience is given a new way to listen and connect with a musical performance. The piece even forces the performers to expand their techniques beyond the norm—“There’s definitely hard stuff for both performers,” said Jeffrey, “the result?—I think overall quite good.”

*Text Credits:*

[www.jeffrey-young.com](http://www.jeffrey-young.com)

Jeffrey Young--telephone interview 06/05/2007

Benjamin Groth—online interview 06/06/2007