

montalvo

A R T S C E N T E R

Dan Coleman (b.1972)
String Quartet No. 2

Dedicated to the Cypress String Quartet

- I. Chorale Variations
- II. Lullaby
- III. Tarantella
- IV. Echoes

String Quartet No. 2 was commissioned by the Lied Center of Kansas, University of Kansas, and the Lied Center for Performing Arts, a unit of the University of Nebraska, and the Cypress Performing Arts Association.

When we hear chamber music by Mozart or Brahms we may forget that it was the product of a collaboration between those composers and specific musicians. Composers wish to communicate with their concert audiences, but it is often their more immediate goal to write directly for those who will perform their music, just as a playwright may have specific actors in mind.

It is immensely satisfying and inspiring to have had a close association with the brilliant Cypress String Quartet for over five years, and to have composed two works especially for them.

My second string quartet is cast in a traditional mold of four movements, and lasts about twenty minutes. Beneath its nervous, energetic surface is a single-minded narrative built from a very small number of ideas. The kaleidoscopic nature of the piece comes from the fact that< with few exceptions< it is relentlessly contrapuntal; each instrument is rhythmically distinct from the other three in almost every phrase.

As I composed the piece, I felt as if each movement was a natural outgrowth of the previous one. The first movement is a set of variations on a chorale (a hymn) that never appears explicitly, but is certainly audible underneath its many decorations. The second movement is contemplative, but still has an undercurrent of restlessness. While the third movement begins by embarking on a tangent, it eventually reminds us of the slow movement's lyricism (as Mendelssohn might do in one of his scherzi). And the final movement remembers a tune from the first movement, elaborates on it, and combines it with all that has come before.

During the past few years I have attempted to reconcile traditional formal notions with my own musical language, and frequently have sought to resolve disparate ideas in my conclusions. This piece is different in that my motifs coexist, jostle against each other, but are never compromised in the end: this is a metaphor of love, and also a celebration of the wonderfully independent voices among a quartet of string players.

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