

Kenneth Fuchs

STRING QUARTET

N^o 5

“American”



FULL SCORE

Composed especially for the Delray String Quartet
(Mei Mei Luo and Tomas Cotik, violins; Richard Fleischman, viola; Claudio Jaffé, violoncello)

VIOLIN I
VIOLIN 2
VIOLA
VIOLONCELLO

I. *Adagio semplice—Allegro gioioso—
Poco agitato (l'istesso tempo)—Adagio misterioso*

II. *Allegro agitato—Presto agitato*

III. *Elegia: Lento cantabile—
Allegro satirico (alla valzer)—Lento—
Allegro satirico, poco agitato—Adagio lamentoso*

IV. *Allegro gioioso—Larghetto, poco misterioso—
Allegro gioioso*

duration: approximately 30 minutes

Throughout my life as a composer, I have studied the complete string quartets of master composers who have revisited the form at intervals, bringing to each return a perspective influenced by intervening work and experience. Beethoven, Bartok, and Shostakovich are outstanding examples of such life-long seekers of truth and individuality in musical expression. Like them, I intend to explore, evaluate, and refine within the purity of the quartet medium my ideas and personal style at intervals throughout my life. It has been ten years since I composed *String Quartet No. 4*. In the meantime I have composed several large orchestral works and concerti incorporating the musical procedures I elaborated in my first four string quartets.

In *String Quartet No. 1* (1982–83), I wrestled with and attempted to manipulate in a personal way the Schoenbergian 12-tone method of pitch organization over a large three-movement sonata-allegro structure. In *Where Have You Been?* (*String Quartet No. 2, After Five Collages by Robert Motherwell*, 1993), I explored the use of a seven-note pitch class as a way of organizing pitch materials idiomatically for string instruments and used five short movements as a way to break down and examine sonata-allegro structure and to explore issues of formal structure; I also continued to explore formal relationships between music and visual art. In *Whispers of Heavenly Death* (*String Quartet No. 3, After Poems by Walt Whitman*, 1996), I continued to refine the use of pitch classes and felt confident enough following my two previous quartets to develop a large three-movement form modeled after late-Beethoven structures. In *String Quartet No. 4* (1999), I abandoned any extra-musical references and created a tightly structured single movement in

three sections and explored elements of minimalist procedures as a way of manipulating melodic and rhythmic motives.

String Quartet No. 5 (“American”) embraces in sound and spirit the stylistic influences of the American symphonic school that have dominated my recent orchestral scores, including *An American Place*, *Atlantic Riband*, *Discover the Wild*, and *United Artists*. A broad and angular “American” melodic theme unifies the entire four-movement composition; the voicing of the contrapuntal lines and resultant harmonies is open, suggesting space and distance. The music is alternately lyrical and playful, sometimes brusque and muscular, at times elegiac, and it is meant to suggest the resilience and brash optimism of the American spirit.

Rigorous contrapuntal procedure is paramount in all of my musical compositions, perhaps no more so in the purity of the string quartet medium, for which some of the most enduring music of the Western tradition has been composed. *String Quartet No. 5* is an in-depth exploration of the contrapuntal possibilities inherent in the single “American” melodic theme that is exposed by the first violin at the beginning of the work.

Movement I. *Adagio semplice—Allegro gioioso—Poco agitato (l'istesso tempo)—Adagio misterioso*

This movement is cast in a modified three-part sonata-allegro form, which telescopes other forms within the exposition, development, and recapitulation.

Adagio semplice (exposition): the first violin begins the quartet’s “American” theme, and in successive entrances the second violin, viola, and cello join in to create a strict four-part canon. The theme provides the motivic elements that form the basis for all musical development throughout the remainder of the composition.

Allegro gioioso (development): the viola introduces a running eighth-note accompaniment figure that features a descending scalar line. This simple descending line—and its ascending inversion—permeates almost all the musical material of the quartet. The first violin introduces a lyrical theme and the second violin follows with a contrasting running eighth-note theme. These two distinct themes, plus the viola accompaniment figure, are actually fragments of fugue subjects and countersubjects. They are introduced in this section and form the basis of a double fugue exposition that is fully developed in the fourth movement. A brief passage featuring trilled notes in all four instruments leads to the next section.

Poco agitato (l'istesso tempo): the “American” theme returns and is transformed through dissonant imitative counterpoint in the violins and cello. The viola introduces a fragment of the thematic material that will be developed in the second movement. This harmonically unstable transitional passage leads to the final section of the movement.

Adagio misterioso (recapitulation): the violin restates the transformed “American” theme in a far-off harmonic region accompanied by eerie glissandi of harmonics in the second violin and cello. The viola intones sotto voce a sinister underlying trilled note. The mood darkens in anticipation of what is to come, and the movement glides to a serene but inconclusive close.

Movement II. *Allegro agitato—Presto agitato*

This movement is a fast scherzo cast in binary form.

Allegro agitato: the first part of the movement features disparate musical textures, including highly syncopated rhythms, acerbic harmonies played in concerted fashion, an arching theme introduced by the viola, and a demonic ostinato played pizzicato by the cello. These textures, based on motivic elements of the “American” theme, are developed in various contrapuntal combinations by all four instruments. The musical atmosphere is agitated and insistent and no resolution is achieved through the extended musical dialogue. The ensemble reaches a rhetorical impasse.

Presto agitato: the viola begins the second part of the movement with a restatement of its lyrical theme at a

faster tempo. The others join in with motivic fragments from the first part of the movement. The dialogue remains obstinate and the four instruments race to a frenzied but unresolved conclusion.

Movement III. *Elegia: Lento cantabile—Allegro satirico (alla valzer)—Lento—Allegro satirico, poco agitato—Adagio lamentoso*

This movement is cast as a four-part adagio elegy. The recurring waltz-like melody, which grows out of the “American” theme, also adapts motivic elements from the melodic theme for my large-scale vocal-orchestral work *Falling Man*, inspired by Don DeLillo’s 2007 post-9/11 novel *Falling Man*, about the events, aftermath and changed lives of 9/11. The *Falling Man* theme also provided the inspiration for my seven *Falling Canons* for solo piano (2009) and my *Falling Trio* (2011).

Lento cantabile: this expansive movement begins with a series of diffuse, searching chords played by all four instruments in harmonics and *sul ponticello*. Following this, the first violin states the transformed “American” theme that appeared at the conclusion of the first movement. The others join in to create a strict four-part canon reminiscent of the opening of the first movement, but in a melancholy tone.

Allegro satirico (alla valzer): the first violin begins an innocent waltz-like theme that is taken up by the others. The moment of respite fades.

Lento: the music dissolves into an upward-aspiring chord progression from the first movement, but the music evaporates first into harmonics, then into a desolate-sounding pizzicato chord, stranded in the upper registers of the instruments.

Allegro satirico, poco agitato: the waltz-like theme appears again, taken up by all four instruments but with an increasingly sinister tone. The theme erupts into a violently-played two-part canon, the violins pitted against the viola and the cello. The music ultimately collapses into the desolate-sounding pizzicato chord, this time furiously and repeatedly plucked in the low registers of the instruments.

Adagio lamentoso: the final section of the movement is a four-part canonical eulogy based on the waltz theme. The music aspires upward but falters and dissolves into the desolate pizzicato chord. The movement ends as it began, with the drifting, searching chords played in harmonics and *sul ponticello*.

Movement IV. *Allegro gioioso—Larghetto, poco misterioso—Allegro gioioso*

The final movement is cast in the form of a double fugue, based on the subject material exposed in the development section of the first movement. The fugue subjects are composed idiomatically around the open strings of the violin, viola, and cello.

Allegro gioioso: the music gathers momentum from a series of chords played *maestoso* growing out of the final pitches of the third movement. The double fugue erupts in the first violin with the statement of the first fugue subject on the violin’s top string, the E. The subject is based on the running eighth-note accompaniment figure with the descending scalar line that was introduced by the viola in the first movement. Successive entrances follow on the second violin (also pitched on the E string) and then on the viola and cello (transposed to those instruments’ top string, the A). Each entrance is accompanied by countersubject motives based on the “American” theme.

The second fugue subject, based on the running eighth-note theme with a contrasting lyrical theme from the first movement, is stated by the second violin. Successive entrances follow on all instruments, and the accompanying countersubject is actually the second fugue subject itself. The exposition of the second fugue subject is a four-part canon as well.

The first fugue subject reappears, now pitched on A, and receives the same treatment as the second subject. The countersubject is the first fugue subject itself, and the four instruments play in four-part canon. The temporal relationship of the canonic entrances is shortened compared with the first fugue subject exposition at the beginning

of the movement, however, and instruments are playing in temporal diminution.

The final restatement of the fugue subjects features the second fugue stated with the first fugue subject as its countersubject, combining fragments of all the countersubject material that has appeared in the movement up to this point. The final fugue statement is an all-encompassing treatment of the quartet's contrapuntal material.

A brief passage from the first movement featuring trilled notes in all four instruments leads to the next section.

Larghetto, poco misterioso: this passage recalls the dark and unstable mood suggested by the music of the third movement. The two violins restate in canon the transformed "American" theme that appeared at the beginning of the third movement. The viola intones mysterious-sounding tremolos, and the cello plays a pizzicato version of the "American" theme in counterpoint with the violins. There is a brief echo of the harmonic and pizzicato chords from the third movement.

Allegro gioioso: the music gathers momentum again from the series of *maestoso* chords played at the beginning of the movement. The dissonant pitches are swept away and the quartet moves boldly to the final section of the piece in a triumphant manner. The first violin begins the restatement of the first fugue subject. The temporal relationship of each successive statement is shortened even more from the previous such treatment, and the finale becomes a victorious four-part stretto based on the first fugue subject. The music moves to a decisive conclusion, affirming the brash optimism of the American spirit.

String Quartet No. 5 ("American") was composed from February through December 2011 in Mansfield Center, Connecticut. I extend my sincere thanks to the members of the Delray String Quartet for their encouragement during the creation of this work and to Mr. Donald Thompson for generously organizing and underwriting the commission.

—Kenneth Fuchs

Premiere performance: January 15, 2012
Delray String Quartet, The Colony Hotel and Cabaña Club, Delray Beach, Florida

Performance rights and materials for this work are available from the publisher:

Edward B. Marks Music Company
c/o Carlin America, Inc.
126 East 38th Street
New York, New York 10016
Tel: (212) 779-7977
Fax: (212) 779-7920
www.ebmarks.com