

String Quartet No. 3 by Richard Wilson

Each of the three movements of my *String Quartet No. 3* bears a title and exhibits a perceptible formal design. The first is called Prelude, not only for the obvious reason, but because its prominent, early-on pedal point--the cello's C-string-- gives rise to a particularly anticipatory feeling. (It may also be that, in the act of titling, I thought of preludes of Bach and their often lavish pedal points.) This opening movement is an arch whose constituent parts are smoothly joined. A central area building to a dynamic high point is enclosed by passages in which the second violin and viola review the harmonic vocabulary of the work as a whole beneath expressive, often high-ranging commentary from the first violin and over the cello's pedal point mentioned above. These are in turn enclosed by a duet between second violin and viola with plucked punctuation from the cello. A trio at the work's opening, this passage expands to four parts as it returns to serve as coda to the first movement.

The second movement takes the name Episode because it serves as a dramatic interlude at a certain remove from the main line of the work. Its character is a blend of scherzo and march. Like those forms, and unlike the first movement, it comprises sharply articulated sections. These may be understood as ABA'B', where A' and B' show interruptions, intercalations, and elaborations of the original statements.

With the concluding Elegy, the slow harmonic motion of the Prelude resumes, but instead of cold, open-string pedals there appears as underpinning the vibrant stopped note, C-sharp, creating a relationship in which the first movement acts as leading tone to the third. (That the resolution of this leading tone is delayed by the entirety of the second movement provides a

structural basis for its being entitled Episode.) The Elegy is a refrain-dominated piece, deeply serious in tone and manner.

I tried to design this work so that the overall shape would be prefigured in general by the form of the first movement. The second movement thus plays a role similar to that of the central section of the first movement. The outer movements are related to each other in expressive intensity if not in thematic detail.

--RW

STRING QUARTET NO 3 was commissioned for the Muir String Quartet by the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation. It is dedicated to the members of the Muir and to Leon Botstein. The Muir gave the first performances at Yale and Vassar in April, 1983. In July, 1984, the Delmé Quartet gave the London première in Wigmore Hall and subsequently recorded the work for broadcast on Radio 3 of the BBC.

A work of substance and expressivity...(it) merits a place in the active repertory.

- *New York Times*