

Brent A. Milam

1830 Dyson Drive
Decatur, GA 30030

www.BrentMilamMusic.com

Phone: (404) 312-2020
bamilam@hotmail.com

String Quartet No. 1 *for 2 violins, viola, and cello* (2009) 24:00

- | | |
|----------------------|------|
| i. Andantino | 7:10 |
| ii. God Machine | 5:30 |
| iii. Scherzo | 4:10 |
| iv. Finale: Cadenzas | 7:00 |

Program Notes: My *String Quartet No. 1* is based on three melodies from a ballet entitled *N.Y. Export: OP. Jazz* by the little-known composer Robert Prince. In fact, despite considerable effort, I only possess this one single recording of his work. Nevertheless, I have remained fascinated by its seamless fusion of jazz and symphonic styles since first hearing it as a child. To me it represents exactly the kind of music I always wished to compose. The first movement of my string quartet is most directly and most obviously related to this original jazz-oriented material. In this movement, all three melodies are presented in their original form although the order and juxtapositions have dramatically changed.

The second movement is an attempt to explore compositional devices other than melody and harmony. In this case, the driving forces are subtle yet continually evolving musical textures. Structurally speaking, the first section is a four part canon wherein each voice enters as imperceptibly as possible with the same melodic material but different rhythms. Although static at the surface, this texture undulates and breathes with constantly shifting timbres and harmonies. The voices align at key points to reveal particular sonorities important throughout the piece. Over time, the first amorphous and sustained texture gradually dissolves into one of oscillating intervals. This shimmering second texture is actually the opposite of the first; although active at the surface, it is effectively static and unchanging underneath.

The subtitle, "God Machine," is not intended to ascribe aspects of deity to a mechanical device, but rather imply a machine so inconceivably large that only God may comprehend its inner workings and function. Somehow, the machine is turned on. Inaudible at first, a faint hum from deep within the enormous structure quietly suggests the colossus is warming up. After considerable rumbling and sudden releases of steam, the massive gears gradually start to turn and an electrical buzz dominates the sound; however, just as the machine reaches a steady pulse, a catastrophic failure brings the immense apparatus to an unexpected and ignoble end.

The "Scherzo" is intended to link the severity and abstract textures of the second movement with the more direct and lighthearted melodic statements of the fourth. Its pointillist texture is derived from fragments of the principle melodies of movement one but its primary theme foreshadows material in movement four.

Brent A. Milam

1830 Dyson Drive
Decatur, GA 30030

www.BrentMilamMusic.com

Phone: (404) 312-2020
bamilam@hotmail.com

The final movement is a rondo wherein the primary theme of the first movement returns in a highly altered form. In order to subtly mimic the design of standard jazz head-tunes wherein the opening melody (or "head") is followed by individual solos from each instrumentalist, this rondo scheme is occasionally interrupted by cadenzas designed to highlight each musician's technical expertise. The first two solos are for violin I and cello, respectively, while the final cadenza is a duet shared by the violist and violin II. The movement ends exactly as the first movement began.

String Quartet No. 1 was selected by adjudication for presentation at the Society of Composers, Inc. National Conference 2008 in Atlanta, GA. It was also selected by the adjudication panel for the GSU Society of Composers, Inc. Student Composition Contest in 2008 and will be recorded for "In With the New, Volume 4, Student Compositions 2009."