

Quartet for Piano and Strings

(A Sea Liturgy)

Carson P. Cooman (Op. 855)

Quartet for Piano and Strings (A Sea Liturgy) (2009) was jointly commissioned for the Moscow Studio for New Music and the Arcturus Chamber Ensemble (Sarah Darling, artistic director). It is dedicated to the Arcturus Chamber Ensemble on its 10th anniversary.

The work is cast in a single movement and is conceived as a “sea liturgy.” It attempts to conjure up an imagined set of spiritual rituals (not connected to any specific religion)—a ceremony of transformation and renewal performed in the context of a sea landscape.

Though not broken into movements, the formal design of the work could be seen as follows:

Processional — (Ritornello) — Invocation — Offering — (Ritornello) — Baptism — Rebirth — Recessional

As with so many of my works, much of the initial musical planning took place in the context of the oceanscapes of Nantucket Island, Massachusetts. Those particular sea landscape were foremost in my mind while writing. The listener may also discard the imagined liturgical apparatus and simply listen to the work as a series of seascapes. (For the purposes of narrative clarity, the above section descriptors will be used in the below narrative.)

The opening *Processional* begins with focused, austere intensity: the instruments unfold from a single pitch (E) into a more rich harmonic landscape. A *Ritornello* of pulsating string harmonics leads into *Invocation*, a warmly lyrical discourse. The *Offering* is a faster, jubilant development of the *Invocation*, where the prayerful melodies of the *Invocation* are transformed into a gift for the sea. A return of the *Ritornello* leads to the *Baptism*. In this section, heterophonic melodies unfold out of the new substrate pitch (D). In the transforming crucible of the water, these lines becomes more and more extended harmonically. The *Rebirth* is a dancing development of the *Baptism*; the harmonic extensions are pushed from dissonance into chords of pure joy. Emerging out of the afterglow of the *Rebirth* is the *Recessional*, in which the music of the *Processional* is revisited, now transformed by the ritual to center on the pitch D. The *Recessional* fades away peacefully, yet fervently.

Carson P. Cooman
December 2009
Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

NOTE: It is suggested that the above program note be reprinted in the concert program. However, the subsections should not be shown in the concert listing as movements. The program listing for the work should appear as follows:

Quartet for Piano and Strings (A Sea Liturgy) (2009)

Carson Cooman (b. 1982)