

About String Quartet No. 1

by James A. Beckel

Susan Chan and Dean Franke commissioned *String Quartet No. 1* in 2005 for their New Century String Quartet. The work is in three movements. The first movement is marked *Allegro Molto*, and the basic form of this first movement is an ABA form in D major. This opening movement is whimsical and lighthearted in nature, featuring the use of string pizzicato and canonic writing.

The second movement, marked *Andante*, is in stark contrast to the first movement. This movement opens in F minor with the cello first stating the main theme to this middle movement. It continues to build over time, modulating to a rather intense, D minor middle section in this basic rondo form. The final return of the A theme which concludes this movement is bi-tonal in nature juxtaposed between F minor and D minor. The mood of this movement is a sad one questioning perhaps the basic nature of man in lieu of September 11th. The bi-tonality of the ending of this middle movement is meant to leave the fate of man's future unanswered.

The final movement of this string quartet is marked *Allegro* and is intended to convey a more optimistic mood. The opening rhythmic G major statement in the 1st Violin is jazzy in nature and meant to feel like a breath of fresh air after the second movement. The responding, pizzicato from the Viola and Cello is a musical reference to the lighthearted mood of the 1st movement. This final movement quickly goes into a driving blues section featuring the solo work of the first Violinist specifically written to showcase one of the commissioners, Dean Franke. This section eventually slows into a gospel-like section marked *Andante ala Recitative* featuring the beautiful viola sound and singing style of one of the other commissioners, Susan Chan. A cascading, ponticello, tremolo motif from this slow blues section takes us back to the recapitulation of this final movement and an exciting ending to this string quartet.