

JEFFREY  
STADELMAN

# THREE STRING QUARTETS

SERAPHITA (CANONS)  
EASTLAND  
STRING QUARTET NO.2

NEW ENGLAND STRING QUARTET

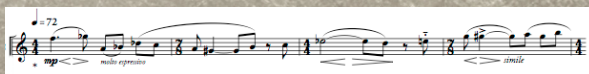


Navona  
Records

FINE MUSIC

# SERAPHITA (CANONS)

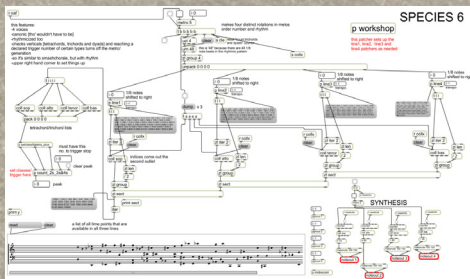
*Seraphita (Canons)* began with my affection for the tune of the first song of Arnold Schoenberg's 1917 set of orchestral songs, Op. 22. This piece had been a serious ear worm for me going back to my twenties, and so I decided to put the melody, with a few adaptations, under the microscope, one might say, of a suite of computer programs (or, more precisely, Max patches) that I had been developing to investigate and gauge the musical potential of any isolated snippet of melody. And when I say "musical" I really mean finding basic canons (as in "Row, Row, Row Your Boat"), which work in harmonically attractive ways—that is, finding ways to take the desired sonorities, transpositions, and progressions to "fall out" of the canons created.



And, sure enough, I found the Schoenberg material to be, at least in my terms, exceedingly fertile ground for canon elaboration.

The piece breaks down into nine separate movements. The first is an elaborate canon that opens with a solo violin statement of the Schoenberg melody and, after the entry of the three other instruments, leads to a rupture within the developing canon. The second movement is a somewhat obsessive and repetitive meditation, while the third, marked *Cantando espressivo*, presents lyrical development of the tune above a walking circle-of-fifths pizzicato bass. Movement 4 offers a brief and violent recollection of Movement 2's meditation.

The fifth movement is marked, "*Legato*;" the march-step of tasto eighths to conjure a not unpleasant sense of subtle, pale, obsessive friction; "feel the crini." In other words, the canonic worlds in this panel are presented through a kind of Venetian-blind-lit ambience, striated and with a strong sense of tactile friction, hair on string.



Movement 6 seems to exist within a folk realm; there are nine total cycles of the basic material, each of which slightly varies previously heard material. It is meant as a showpiece of sorts for the first violin.

Movement 7 is a long, ardent double canon that uses the adapted Schoenberg source alongside what begins as a low, two-note chromatic figure. As with movement 1, this canon finds its way into a cul de sac of sorts—in this instance devolving into more loop-oriented material reminiscent of movement 5.

Movement 8 is a short canonic quasi-chorale somehow hovering in the vicinity of A-flat major.

The final movement presents evolving development of motives from the original Schoenberg subject, within various sporadically materializing canonic settings. There is a bit more “orchestration” (as opposed to one-instrument-for-one-voice canonic patterning) here, with arrival finally on another looping canon-chorale featuring, for a few moments anyway, the subject in all four instruments.

This piece is the best representative on this disk of my current work, c. 2016; going forward I am very interested in fine-tuning (by writing canons) generators of subtly marshaled, internally referential resemblances—all the while following my ear into both familiar late-tonal and post-serial harmonic worlds, and letting it follow and develop new harmonies that may arise.

## EASTLAND

I *never* write program music, but in the case of the string quartet, *Eastland*, I guess I did.

This quartet is a sort of meditation on the Eastland disaster, a horrendous Great Lakes steamship tragedy that took place on July 24, 1915.

Thousands of workers from the Western Electric plant in Chicago, many of them Eastern European immigrants, were heading out on a long-planned employee picnic. They boarded the ship in downtown Chicago near the Clark Street bridge over the Chicago River, early in the morning.



The diagram shows a ship's hull with a large section missing, illustrating the disaster. The score is written for four strings (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass) and includes a variety of musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.



At 7:30 a.m., while still at dock, the ship rolled quietly on its side, and within minutes 845 people were dead. They died just a few feet from shore and in 20 feet of calm water.

When I read about this event in early 2000 I was surprised to find myself so affected by it. I realized upon reflection that I was associating this bygone tragedy with the death by drowning, in 1963, of a close family member. I wanted more than anything



to depict the bitter irony of these disasters (the shallow water, the banal and deadly rolling-over in fair weather, the human error). This is done in musical ways that may or may not be self-evident.

Eyewitnesses reported that the boat capsized just as the on-board musicians struck up the tune, “I’m on My Way to Dublin Bay.” This song is presented in varied form perhaps 2/3 of the way through the piece.

I believe the piece, while difficult, is in fact expressively straightforward—to begin with, it aims to take its sardonic attitude to existential extremes.

There are many long glissandos. They are always played very evenly, both in time and in pitch, almost like a mechanically sweeping oscillator. I suppose they represent in some way implacable, insipid, blind fate, and the way one’s life may be swept up and down by forces completely outside of one’s control and, more importantly, one’s ability to comprehend or even identify.

## STRING QUARTET NO.2

I wrote this piece while working as a graduate student with the great American composer, Donald Martino, in 1988. I had in fact created the basic material for the piece during my spring 1987 work with Martino’s equally original Harvard colleague, Earl Kim.

The piece, in three movements, begins with a “too short” introductory essay in which the harmonies and relationships of the entire work are presented. The first movement’s pace is moderate and comfortable: I hear this movement as consonant, friendly, lyrical. Somewhere near the middle of the movement there is a dreamy, simple, repetitive “mobile” in which the basic materials rotate at different rates.

The second movement came about initially as an arrangement of a short solo piano variation set. No particular theme is ever presented however; the piece just gets down to variations of the underlying platonic melody from the start, while each instrument of the quartet is featured, modestly, in succession.

The final movement strives to whip up a generally precipitous and virtuosic whirlwind. While several slower contrasting episodes intervene, the rapid music of the outset remains in mind as the primary material. Looking back now, I hear of course recourse to the works of Berg, Bartok and Sessions, especially in the slower, more emotionally laden episodes that I think of being in a personal, “antique style” (stile antico) relative to the “modern style” (stile moderno) in sections, at least, of the faster ones.

The piece won the Blodgett Quartet Competition at Harvard in the year of its composition, and was performed in 1988 at Paine Hall in Cambridge by the New World String Quartet. It is dedicated to my wife, Jean. — *Jeffrey Stadelman*

I'M ON MY WAY TO DUBLIN BAY

Song

Lyrics and Music By  
TREVOR H. MARTINO

PIANO

VOICE

Handwritten musical score for piano and voice, titled "I'M ON MY WAY TO DUBLIN BAY". The score includes piano accompaniment and a vocal line with lyrics. The lyrics are: "I'm on my way to Dublin Bay, I'm on my way to Dublin Bay, I'm on my way to Dublin Bay, I'm on my way to Dublin Bay." The score is written in G major, 2/4 time, and features a simple melody with a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are written in a simple, conversational style.

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